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Tom Foster – Editor

I'm heading to The Far Side. It's somewhere different for each of us. I think of 'The Far Side' as riding that's wildly at odds to the riding we each normally do. My 'normal' riding isn't easy to define, but left to choose my own path my riding usually involves some degree of challenge. Maybe it's distance, maybe it's terrain, maybe it's a bike totally unsuited for an intended task or maybe it's just out and out speed. For me those things say 'adventure'.

I'm always humping around painkillers, multi-function tools, hard-as-rock tyres and fuel cells that take a day to fill. I live off roadkill and sleep in a hollowed-out log if that's what it takes to meet the challenge.

But lately I've been looking at a different kind of adventure rider.

I've been noticing those guys who seem to stay fairly clean, have shiny, gorgeous bikes and are smiling all the time. It's as though they don't have to wear the same pair of jocks for two weeks at a time and suck clumps of blue-green algae for the nutrients available to negotiate the lunar landscape they're riding through. They're on a huge variety of bikes and wear all kinds of different gear, but there are a few things they all have in common. They all seem to have hard panniers, for instance. And they have tyres with hardly any knob pattern at all. And in the mornings when I'm cracking the ice off the tarp I've slept under – so I can melt the ice to make tea from a used teabag I found in the bush when I stopped to deal with a handful of smashed spokes – they appear on the verandah of the nearest country pub looking freshly shaved and usually glowing with the heat of their morning shower. They watch the sun come

up, laugh a lot while they sip from steaming, clean coffee cups, pick up a pannier in each hand, then head downstairs to clip the luggage on their quiet, smooth bikes and ride off in the direction of the nearest café for breakfast.

Those guys are on the The Far Side for me, and that's where I'm going for a while.

Hard panniers have always been anathema to me. They catch on everything and make the bike as wide as Bronwyn Bishop's interpretation of 'within the guidelines'. They're hopeless... unless you're not riding tight, muscle-cracking tracks with trees and rocks hemming you in either side of course.

And those tyres! The first time they get a run of slimy, wet, red clay, they'll have no hope... except, they look for country pubs, cafés, and awesome landmarks, and not many of those are on slimy, wet, red-clay trails.

And those expensive, matching touring suits! Who can afford to replace them twice a year?

Except, the type of riding those guys do,

"I'll live off roadkill and sleep in a hollowed-out log if that's what it takes."

they don't tear up and destroy their apparel during high-speed falls on rutted trails and in multiple, chest-deep creek crossings.

It's not that I've avoided that type of riding, and I've enjoyed it when it's come around. It's just that I've always been drawn to a challenge. I've seen those guys when I've been out riding and thought to myself, "Each to his own. If that's the riding they enjoy, good on 'em."

I'm not too bright, but it finally dawned on me that maybe every adventure ride doesn't need be structured so success means survival. There's a sheer joy to be found in just being on a great bike with great people and seeing great places.

That's what I'm going to try for a while. I'm sure I'll do plenty of challenge riding as well, because that's my natural inclination. But I'm going to see how I feel about chasing a little comfort and looking for something other than a series of adversities to be overcome.

I'll let you know how I get on.

ADV

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▲ **On the cover:** We rediscovered the joy of sightseeing on Triumph's Tiger 800 XRx and Aprilia's Caponord. Ken Dark still likes the rough stuff, and tells his Finke story.



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Jacob's Ladder, TAS
2014 BMW GS Safari

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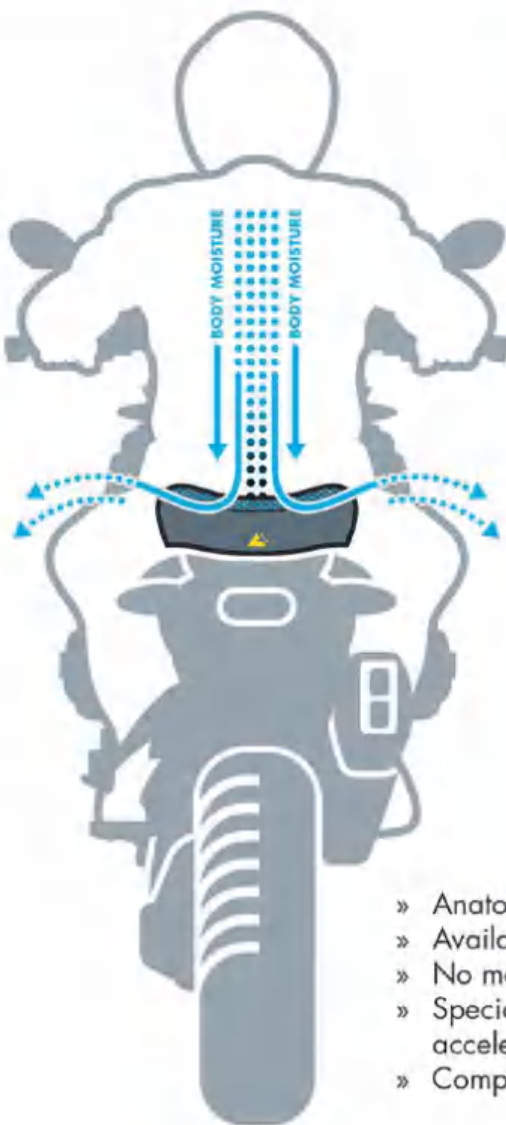
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Left: Trudi and Nick of Maschine are both keen riders.
Below: They're Maschines.

NSW High Country ride

November 8-13, 2015

Maschine is Trudi and Nick Selleck, and they're probably best known as the organising force behind the last 10 BMW Safari events. Now Maschine is running under its own name, and the first big adventure ride looks like a bottler.

Directors Nick and Trudi Selleck have long sought to run a flagship annual event that reflects their attitude to riding – social, inclusive, friendly, challenging with a deep sense of camaraderie – and one that caters to all brands. Guided by the motto 'By riders, for riders', Maschine will be introducing many innovations that allow riders to influence the decisions of the daily routes, group riding to and from the event, the nightly activities, and media production during and after the event.

Delivering unrivalled attention to detail and phenomenal event support, Maschine welcomes riders of any brand of adventure bike, and too often forgotten, say Nick and Trudi, Maschine also extends an invitation to enduro riders.

The NSW High Country is renowned for its fantastic riding terrain and it will set the stage for a great week's adventure riding from November 8 to November 13, 2015. The alpine stage rewards riders with stunning vistas from the high ground and challenging riding through the valleys. From there it's on to the south-coast stage where deep forest, deep soil and deep challenges – it's deep, man! – will supply a happy ending.

As we've seen in the BMW Safaris, the NSW High Country ride is a fully supported event with a crew of technical, tyre and medical support following riders day and night.

Bookings are open now. Subscribe for event updates at maschine.com.au or call for more information: Trudi on 0414 844 984 or Nick on 0428 023 057. **ADV**



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The models that will be used on Britton Adventures' Cuba Tours include the Electra Glide, Street Glide, Low Rider, Switchback Dyna, V-Rod, Sportster Super Low, Street Bob, and Wide Glide.

No way!

During the set-up time Mike and Angela thought one of the names of the partners looked familiar, so they enquired. If you know your revolutionary history you'll understand why they were a little excited when they realised they'd be working with Ché Guevara's youngest son, Ernesto Guevara!

Although Ernesto never knew his father it seems he shares Ché's passion for 'bikes, as demonstrated in the movie and book *Motorcycle Diaries*.

Book it

The tour is for 15 days, from October 28 through to November 11, in Cuba. The dates exclude travel time to and from, and will take you from the lively capital of Havana to Santiago de Cuba in the south and Maria La Gorda on the coast in the north, plus plenty of places in between.

If you like the idea of cruising the streets, highways, avenues and lanes of Cuba on a big, late-model Harley, contact Mike or Angela at Britton Adventures.

They're out of the country a lot at present, so the best way to contact them is by email: mike@adventurerides.co.nz or angela@adventurerides.co.nz.

Don't muck around though – it's an awesome tour and due to bike availability numbers are limited.

ADV

Create your own motorcycle diary

Cuba! The Caribbean island known for its white-sand beaches, rolling mountains, cigars, rum and exotic scenery. You can ride there.

Organising a motorbike tour of Cuba has been a long-held wish for Mike and Angela of Britton Adventures, but finding reliable bikes they could hire legally has been the problem. In 2013 Mike and Ange even went to Cuba to check it out, but found only privately owned, and therefore illegal, older Russian models.

What they did find there was a vibrant and exciting country with great scenery, a lively culture, and friendly people. Even more inspired they returned to New Zealand determined to find a way to get a bike tour in Cuba up and running.

Just like that

Then an email exploded into their inbox, out of the blue, from a Cuban company with late-model, big-bore Harleys available. The company wondered whether Britton Adventures wanted to become their Oceania agents?

You bet they did!

So a partnership was formed and 2015 is

the year for the kick-off of Britton Adventures Viva! Cuba! tours.

"Yes," said Three-star Mike. "Harleys."

"They're certainly something different for us, but we're always looking for new experiences. Getting access to these Harleys has opened up a lot of possibilities."



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patrol the park, is a practical way to assist in the protection of this unique and important part of our world.

The inaugural Blue Waves Rally in 2014 saw 15 bikes donated to Park Rangers in one region of this vast National Park. Mike was one of the riders on the initial Rally and became an invaluable part of the team with his practical skills and knowledge of touring in Mongolia, mechanical skills, and Yamaha motorcycles in general.

Support the 2015 Blue Waves Rally Mongolia

While we're talking about Mighty Mike and Angela, they've been operating tours in Mongolia for donkey's years – see the story in issue #03 – and wanted to give something back to a country and people they've learned to love.

In 2013 the Lake Hovsgol Conservancy and the Mongol Ecology Center launched the Blue Waves Moto Rally for Rangers. Its aim is to raise awareness of the global significance of Lake Hovsgol National Park, to rally an audience worldwide, and to support, fully equip, and train the park rangers working to preserve the magnificent ecosystem. Lake Hovsgol is one of the oldest and cleanest lakes: it contains between one- and two per cent of the world's freshwater, and the lake and the surrounding National Park are being destroyed by illegal poaching, deforestation, mining, and development.

After seeing the worn-out motorcycle of the Chief Ranger break down while chasing illegal campers, Robert 'Mac' McIntosh, co-founder of the Lake Hovsgol Conservancy, turned to his fellow conservationists and said, "I am going to buy a bike, ride it all the way to the lake, and give it to this ranger. Are you in?"

It turned out to be the start of something special.

Britton is in!

When Mike and Ange were approached by the organisers of the Blue Wave Rally in early 2014 they had no hesitation in becoming involved in the project. And when they heard the bikes that were to be given to the rangers were trusty Yamaha AG200s they were even more enthusiastic.

Donating reliable trail bikes to the Lake Hovsgol Park Rangers, so they can better

Join in

The 2015 Blue Wave Rally aims to raise funds to purchase bikes for another group of rangers, this time in the remote Taiga region, north-west Mongolia. Participants on the Rally will ride approximately 2000km and then hand the bikes over to the Park Rangers. Mike is again one of the riders and Angela is also joining the Rally this time as part of the support crew.

Three other Kiwi riders are raising funds for a ranger's bike and joining the Rally. Iain and Stuart are both farmers from the Dannevirke region, and Mischeal, a nurse who operates two dementia-care homes, from North Canterbury. Mischeal's 15-year-old daughter, Jessica, will also be travelling with the Rally in one of the support vehicles.

This year, 20 rangers will be the recipients of Yamaha AG200s, gear and equipment. Motorcycles are often perceived as environmentally unfriendly, however in the case of the Blue Wave Rally For Rangers they'll go a long way to assisting the preservation of one of the world's unique and precious ecosystems.

ADV



Above: Mighty Mike Britton and one of the rangers who protect the Lake Hovsgol environment.

Left: The rally riders and rangers.

Razorback Road, Sofala

Words and images: Bob Wozga

Having his mates bail didn't stop Bob Wozga from riding anyway. He shares some great route possibilities and some experiences of a solo loop in the central west of NSW. Grab yourself a map and follow his thoughts.



A

*long time ago came a
man on a track*

*Walking thirty miles
with a sack on his back*

*And he put down his load where he
thought it was the best.*

He made a home in the wilderness.

*What a brilliant way to start one
of the best songs ever written –*

*Telegraph Road. Sitting by a fire next
to the Turon River at Sofala, listening
to Dire Straits, I could imagine the
first settler coming past this way,
liking what he saw and settling in.
That would've been before the gold
was found.*

*Sofala is still a great adventure-
riding destination.*

A few choices

There are a number of ways to get to Sofala. The easiest, and still a good ride, is from Bathurst along the Sofala Road. Even though it's all bitumen these days it still has some good twisty bits.

Then there's the Duramana Road to Turondale, which concludes at a T-intersection. Turn left at the intersection to find Hill End and right to Sofala. This route has some nice twisty bits and the road has been upgraded, widened and is now bitumen, too.

A nice stretch from Bathurst via Limekilns gives a mix of bitumen and gravel and is, for



Above: It's worth the trip in Autumn just to see the colours of the poplar trees heading into Lithgow and Bathurst.

Left: An old homestead on Crudine Road.



me personally, the best.

From the Mudgee side there's the Peel Road at Ilford and the Hill End Road that starts north-west of Mudgee, and most people will take these two. However, there are two other roads worth a look: Razorback Road at Running Stream and the Crudine Road just before Aarons Pass.

Fishin'

The Razorback Road was built by Chinese miners as a shortcut from the top of Running Stream during the Sofala gold rush to save having to go all the way to Ilford. The Crudine Road is farmers' road, mostly gravel, that starts at the Castlereagh Highway and ends at Turondale.

A good weekend ride from Sydney is the loop from Bathurst to Sofala, up Razorback Road to Running Stream, returning along Crudine Road through Sofala, and then returning to Bathurst via Limekins. There's a reasonable campground along the Turon River about five kilometres



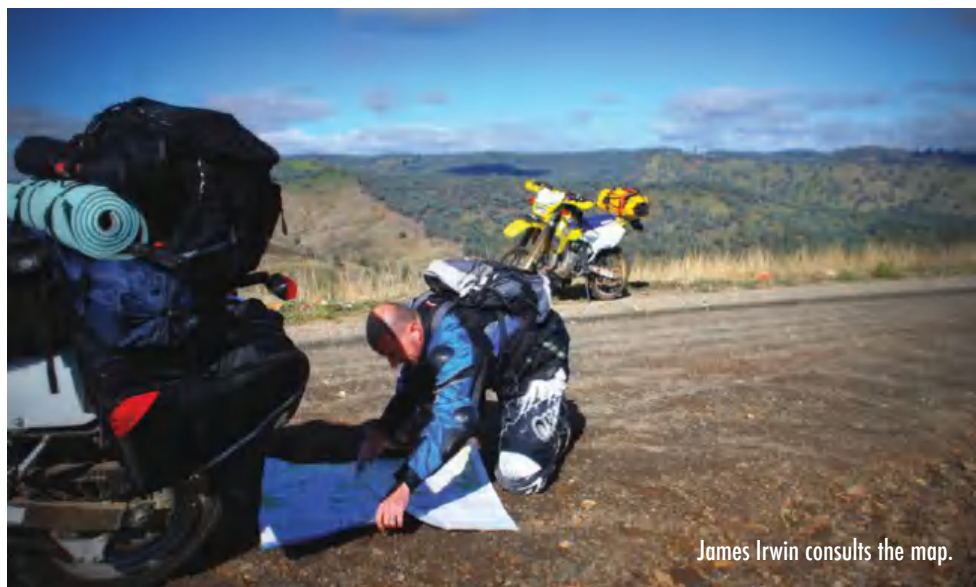
Sofala Road leaving Bathurst.

from town along the Upper Turon Road. Camping is free, there's a public loo on site and garbage bins. That's all the amenities provided.

The river still provides specks of gold for those wanting to try their hand at panning and there are trout for those who want to throw in a line. ▶



James takes in the sites.



James Irwin consults the map.



Tempest

After the ride from Sydney, it's good to kick back and have coffee and biscuits – or a couple of beers and bag of chicken chips – while watching the river for any movement on the surface that gives away a trout lurking beneath.

That's what I was doing as the afternoon wore on. Then grey clouds began to appear on the horizon and the evening grew darker as the grey clouds became more threatening. Lightning flashed over the hilltops while dinner was cooked over the fire to only slight rumblings of thunder. The lightning show entertained me for a while before, finally, a downpour extinguished the fire and the tent was pummeled by the driving rain. Thunder cracked straight after the lightning bolts lit up the inside of the tent.

Thunderstorms in this part of the hills are something to experience. Usually after lightning there's a silence and a thunderclap comes a few seconds later. On this occasion the thunder rolled up through the hills and lasted for an eternity. I counted 25 seconds before the rolling crescendo faded away. The tent was battered for most of the night, but thanks to improvements in camping gear, I was still comfortable in the adverse weather.

Make a stand

With the rising sun, kangaroos fed on the side of the road and didn't take much notice of me. Others forgot what they were and stood up, looking from side to side pretending to be meerkats.

Having packed up camp and loaded the bike, the Razorback Road was waiting to be explored. It started just past the ford at the campground with a sign that cautioned against passing on the road for the first few kilometres as it climbed the hill, and it was hard to concentrate on the road while still taking in the scenery in the morning light. Surprisingly, after the previous night's storm, the road was still in quite good condition. There were a couple of muddy spots, but it was mostly wet gravel, and as it wound up the hill it felt like climbing to the top of the world.

We may not have real mountains in Australia, but the views are still breathtaking. I found a stretch of road safe enough to pull over to take a couple of photos, and the sound of a distant motor echoed in the valley below. A lone rider crawled up the road and stopped for a chat. It turned out he'd had the same idea as myself: when it comes to exploring, if people pull out of doing a ride at the last moment, it shouldn't stop you from going anyway. James Irwin, the rider, had travelled from Newcastle to ride these roads. Having spent most of his time on the Central Coast around Newcastle, he wanted to see what the central west had to offer. His riding buddies pulled out at the last moment and,

Top: Camp by the Turon River at Sofala.

1: Have you driven a ford lately?

2: Kangaroos who think they're meerkats.

3: Crudine Road is a great stretch that has a small section of bitumen but is largely gravel.



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undeterred, he drove down to Mudgee with the bike on a trailer and set out on the ride anyway.

James had his route written on a pad and had a GPS to help him navigate, and I pulled out a couple of maps so we could compare notes. I still like to use maps. They give a broader picture of where you are and what's around.

While we talked a few more groups of riders breezed past. It seemed to be a popular stretch of road. Maybe it'd be worth setting up a coffee-and-doughnut stand along there.

Crudine Road

It was a fantastic road to travel, changing from cleared hillsides to heavily wooded forests nearer to Running Steam, and the road conditions were sound. There were a couple of soft spots but, on the whole, the

riding was pretty good with very few potholes to look out for.

About 17km or so on the Sydney side of Running Stream is Capertee. It's the nearest fuel stop, so I raced down there to fill up and get a coffee at the servo before heading west again to take the Crudine Road back to Bathurst.

This is a great stretch of road that has a small section of bitumen but is largely gravel. The turnoff is 10km past Ilford and is well worth the ride. The bridge at Warrangunia Creek has seen better days, so the council has ploughed a bypass beside it. Ruins of farmhouses dot paddocks along the road and old gold diggings can be spotted beside creek banks. The road rolls with the hills and a rider just needs to dodge the odd roadkill before meeting the Hill End Road at Turondale and being offered the choice of the return trip to Bathurst via either Sofala or Duramana Road.

It's a brilliant stretch to ride along.

Don't miss it

Overall, it's a relaxing weekend ride from Sydney to explore the Greater West and Autumn is the perfect time. The days are warm enough to be comfortable, while at night it's still cool enough for a fire but warm enough to camp.

It's worth the trip at that time just to see the Autumn colours of the poplar trees heading into Lithgow and Bathurst.

And to just sit beside a river.

ADV

Top: Razorback Road is as great to see as it is to ride.

Below left: The Razorback Road was built by Chinese miners as a shortcut from the top of Running Stream.

Below: Upper Turon Road.



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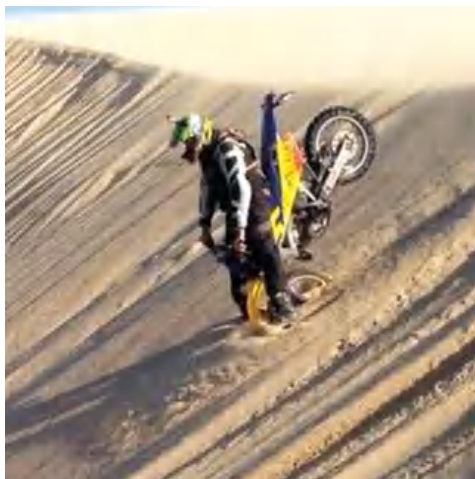
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ANDREW BRODRIGG



One of the best things about our sport is the people it throws together.

Here's an adventure rider chosen at random from the thousands who read this magazine. Everyone, meet...

ANDREW BRODRIGG

Q. Where's home?

A. Hobart.

Q. How old are you?

A. 45 physically, 17 mentally. Crashes just hurt more now.

Q. Are you registered on the AdvRiderMag forum? If so, what's your handle?

A. No. I'm on Facebook though. I'm an administrator on the 'Adventure Ride Tasmania' page. 'Tasmanian Adventure Motorcycle Group' is another relevant group.

Q. What bike do you ride?

A. 2010 BMW R1200 GSA and a 2014 Yamaha WR450. Our family also has a couple of Can-Am quads.

Q. Have you ridden with Jason Gale down there in Tassie?

A. Yes, a couple of organised rides.

Q. What do you like most about the mag?

A. It caters to my demographic and isn't full of rubbish about stadium motocross in the USA. It's also nice to see enduro getting some coverage.



Q. What's something that really peeves you on a ride?

A. Ride organisers that cater to their ego instead of the least-skilled rider. Not everyone wants to climb cliff faces on a 1200.

Q. What do you do to cope with cold down there in winter?

A. Grow a pair. Go riding off-road – you warm up pretty quick. Having said that, people think Tassie is one stop short of Antarctica. Winter is one of the best times to ride here. Goretex is your friend.

Q. Do you often carry a chainsaw on rides?

A. Obviously you've seen the photos.

Q. What's your favourite thing to carry on a ride?

A. Funnily enough, a chainsaw. It's good being able to clear the track instead of having to double back.

Q. What's the thing you have to carry that annoys you most on a ride?

A. Also a chainsaw, due to the bulk.

Q. You're involved in organising rides.

What's your favourite area to ride in?

A. Bridport in Tassie's northeast for dirt bikes. We have access to a holiday house and there's great riding all around the area from big sand dunes to single track in rainforest. I have the rare ability to sniff out a pub in the middle of nowhere, right

about lunch time. Is the Weldborough Hotel or Pub-in-the-Paddock familiar to anyone?

Adventure riding is newer to me. So far my favourite ride was from St Helens through the Scamander Forest Reserve – an area called The Avenue. To finish we traversed the base of Ben Lomond (one of Tassie's bigger mountains) and ended with a descent and hill climb after dark.

Q. What's the toughest area to ride in Tassie?

A. Around Mathinna, south east of Launceston on dirt bikes. It's dusty-as in summer, and slippery and steep in winter. Huon Valley is tough in winter. It's clay, rutted single track, making it almost quad-only terrain.

On adventure bikes it's from Nugent to Buckland in the southeast. I took my GSA through stuff that was more suited to a trail bike. My wife Katie came along on her 650 XCcountry and starred. Her uncle, Tim Ritchie, was our guide. He's ridden the most tracks in Tassie out of any rider I've met.

Q. You think mainland riders are super tough and skilful though, right?

A. I can't answer. I haven't ridden with any. Maybe they're too scared to try Tassie? Tim says he's broken a few that have been brave enough to head south.

ADV

Touratech KLR650

Touratech is probably best known for its top-end BMW and KTM gear, but it makes top-end equipment for a huge range of on- and off-road bikes, including that prince of adventure bikes, Kawasaki's KLR. Just have a look at this example. To see the individual items close up and watch some video of the Touratech KLR in action, log on to www.touratech.com.au

ADV



WISH YOU WERE HERE

Climbing to The Horn, Mount Buffalo, Victoria.



A close-up, low-angle shot of the rear of a motorcycle. The focus is on the large, knobby rear tire and the surrounding engine and exhaust components. The motorcycle appears to be parked on a dirt surface.

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A row of six different Mitas motorcycle tire models, each shown in profile to highlight its unique tread pattern. From left to right, they are labeled E-07, E-08, E-09D, E-10D, MC24, and MC30.

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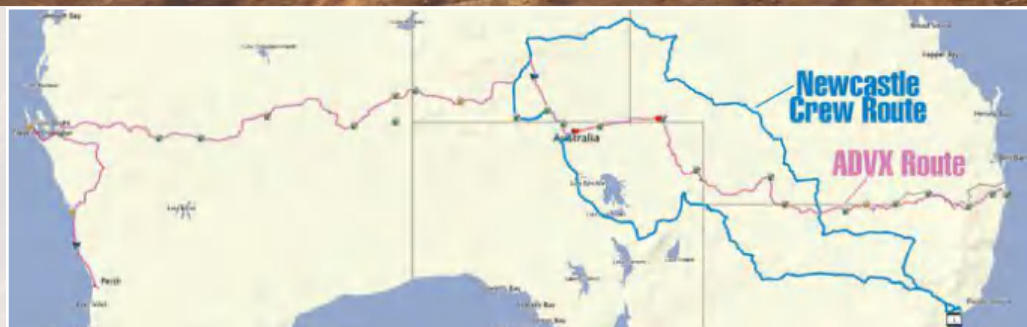
Crossed at the centre

The long weekend in June is a big one for the Northern Territory town of Alice Springs. It's the running of the Finke Desert Race, and last issue we saw ADVX regroup and take in the race. But riders from all over Australia converge on 'The Alice' for the big event. Here's a couple of groups who filtered their way through the ADVX show while running off their own rides that same weekend.

I Finke I can

Words and images: Ken Dark

A group of mates made their way to Finke and then coincidentally followed the ADVX route for a good part of the way back to the nation's east coast. These guys probably had more laughs and fun per kilometre than the bigger show. *Adventure Rider Magazine* regular Ken Dark was one of the crew and tells the story.



There was no need to set the alarm on the morning of our departure. The rain on the roof was thunderous and would've woken the dead. It was time to unpack the wet-weather suit and head off into the damp dawn for the start at the historic Wollombi Pub in the Hunter Valley, NSW. The goal for day one was a dip in the hot bore at Burren Junction.

Rain, rain and more rain thrashed down all the way, and when we pulled into the campground at the bore any spot that wasn't 100mm deep in mud was only dry because a caravan was parked on it.

Luckily the Burren Pub had nice, dry, warm beds.

Leader's jersey

The yellow jersey in bicycle racing is a badge of honour, right?

Harry, the ride organiser, brought along a yellow vest to be worn as a Cape Of Shame for the person doing the most foolish thing each day. Matt 'The Pope' Eke had a religious experience and kissed the ground while by himself on a wet, greasy shortcut. Consequently, he earned the first yellow robing.

The standard-tanker KTMs

needed fuelling at regular intervals and the 30-litre DR650 boys kept ragging owners of the Austrians about needing to drink from mother's teat so often. That was until Simon, one of the smart-arsed tanker boys, ran out of fuel miles from anywhere and needed a boost from Harry's 'mower fuel' can.

Payback is a wonderful thing. Guess who wore the Shroud Of Embarrassment for the next day?

Head first

Before pushing on to Coopers Creek at Windorah for our overnight of day three, we stopped in to have a yarn to the Cunnamulla Fella.

In order to get all riders and bikes into The Alice in good shape, Harry had decided to do a fair run of blacktop for the first few days. As we sat at the bridge over Coopers Creek contemplating our lack of dirt riding so far, the nature trail into Windorah was just too appealing. It's only about five kilometres or so, but it was a bit like a farmer's dog being let off the chain. The



entire group attempted to shed the frustration of 1500km of tar in one little sandy section. Of course the inevitable happened. Corners were overshot, testosterone overloaded and Ian committed to a very close-up track inspection on his first outing on his shiny new V-Strom.

It was pretty normal stuff really.

In tents

While fuelling up at Windorah, Chad realised he'd lost his tent. So you know who got the Leader's Vest for the next day.

We hit our first camp with no tent for Chad, but would you believe the general store had a tent for sale? And for the



Main: There weren't a lot of landmarks to call regroups. It was just a matter of stopping and waiting.

Far left: The pink line is ADVX. The blue line is the Newcastle crew. The crossover is Alice Springs.

Left: The crew at Cameron Corner. From left: Ken Dark (author), Simon Reid, Nick Mahoney, Chad Jefferson, Harry Harrison, Matt Eke, Ian Harcourt, and Mick Pilgrim.

Above: The Shroud Of Embarrassment.

CROSSED AT THE CENTRE

princely sum of only \$25!

We all reckoned someone must've died in it and that accounted for the low price. That kept Chad awake all night waiting for the ghosts.

We had a great bush camp and a chance to try out Mr Campbell's culinary delights, and that topped off another beaut day in the saddle.

Fall guys

Next stop was Bedourie, but as the group arrived everyone realised there was no Pope.

He'd had his second – of eight – religious experiences, each of which involved another ground-kissing exercise. It was a very up-close inspection of a gravel windrow, apparently. He limped into the town clinic dripping life juices from a badly gashed arm.

Fuel at Tobermorey and Jervois stations across the Plenty Highway were welcome breaks on the two-day run into The Alice, and yellow-jersey infringements were issued for two stationary-while-parking drops by Pope and Nick.

Bus-ted

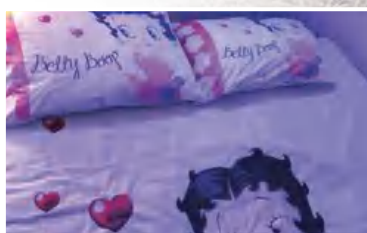
Our accommodation at Alice Springs was in a backpackers' establishment. It sounded good from the east coast, but when presented with a room about as big as an outhouse, with six bunks jammed in amongst the scattered clothing of other guests, I had second thoughts. I don't think I could ever be a submariner, sharing minuscule bunks and all the odours attached. So call me a snob, but I tried for a hotel room. Because of the Finke Desert Race, there were no hotel rooms available in town, but the manager of the establishment offered me 'the penthouse' for just another \$25. What a bargain! I had a room to myself.

The photos of Betty The Bus tell it all. What a great, funky experience.

I copped my yellow-jersey day here – simply for showering in the ladies' shower.

Tag along

Scrutineering at Finke is a great experience. All the competitors' equipment is lined up in one location, and the stars in their flash stands were all happy to pose for photographs. The money spent on the Trophy trucks especially needed to be seen to ►



Top: Camping in the middle of nowhere is a highlight of rides like this one.

Above left: The author showing signs of no stress at all.

Above right: Swags and tents both got a look in.

Left and below left: It might not look like a penthouse, but compared to the regular accom, Betty The Bus was luxury.

Below: Good nutrition is important on a challenging ride.

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be believed. Those things are serious pieces of engineering.

Prologue was a great chance to see the competitors do their thing up close and personal. Being mostly KTM riders, we were tickled to see Toby Price take out the prologue, but the highlight was possibly the Trophy truck that rolled right in front of the boys.

This is where the ADVXers and the Newcastle latte crew shared common ground. I met the magazine's editor and publisher at the official event dinner. Both parties had tales of woe: Tom for having a discussion with a 'roo and other bike issues, while Kurt had a clutch failure on the run down the access road to Finke. Kurt flew home while Tom joined our crew to make up the ninth man for the trip home.

Sensible

Dust, traffic, and more dust met us aplenty on the run down to Finke.

We pushed on, aiming to get ahead of the crowd, and camped the night at Mount Dare, where we had to join a big queue at the bowlers as most of the ADVX crew had the same idea.

I know ADVX has been reported elsewhere but I'd like to include just a couple of personal experiences. The Finke Gorge, west of Alice Springs, was the test run to determine if entrants really wanted to have a crack at The Simpson crossing. It was tough, especially for those not in front. Once the sand was cut up it was doubly tough. A selfie of Marcus you'll find on these pages described the challenge without the need for words. I also met a few riders down the Oodnadatta Track who had entered The Simpson, only to realise it was going to be a relentless struggle of which they wanted no part. I think they were very wise to join us on the run to Maree.

String theory

One interesting bloke we met on the ride was Danny, a Pom who became a little confused when he found a gate across the route. ▶



Top: The rocks at the edge of the road were the tallest things between us and the horizon.

Above: APC Rally regular Hopper – see issue #06 – was on his way through Mount Dare with ADVX when he copped a photobombing from AdvRiderMag's editor.

Left: Marcus was attempting the Finke Gorge as part of ADVX. The pic illustrates better than words how tough it was.

Below: Fuel and cold-drink stops were sometimes at very small communities, and that added to the interesting sights on the ride.



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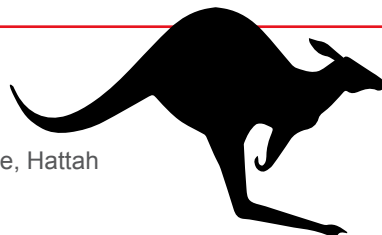
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CROSSED AT THE CENTRE

Apparently back in the Mother Country no such thing exists. One just does not go through a closed gate. It was late in the afternoon when he struck the obstacle so he camped the night. He awoke the next morning to see another rider just open the gate and ride through.

Welcome to the outback, Danny!

We also met two young female tourists while traversing the Plenty Highway. One was on a 250cc bike while the other was support in a 4x4. We helped pick up and straighten out the bike from an incident in a nasty rocky corner. When discussing the cause of the get-off we discovered the young lady was getting tired so she'd used a bit of string to tie the throttle on. That's cruise control at its most basic – it's just not a good thing to do on a rocky gravel road.

Spring time

Dalhousie Springs should be on everyone's bucket list.

The place is quite unique. It's not just the warm temperature of the water, but the thousands of little fish that love to exfoliate the more aromatic parts of the body – your feet, that is! You can pay big dollars for a foot clean like that in some exotic overseas locations. At Dalhousie Springs you get it for free. The challenge is getting there. Whichever way you come from there's some serious country to cross. Rocks from the north, the Simpson Desert from the east and sandy tracks from the south. It's a serious adventure-rider's dream.

Next!

Exotic names like Oodnadatta, the Strzelecki Track, Merty Merty, Cameron Corner, Tibbooburra and White Cliffs provided plenty of interest and some fantastic riding on the way home. The road voted the most fun was the run along The Old Strzelecki into Cameron Corner from Merty Merty.

Of course more yellow-jersey awards were presented on the way home. We had one crash that caused a coolant leak among other evils, and the usual array of flat tyres due to over exuberance and sharp stones.

All in all it was a fantastic ride with a great bunch of blokes. There were lots of laughs, and I just can't wait for the next one.

ADV



Above: This sign hadn't even been converted to metric yet. It was the outback, alright.

Left: Dalhousie Springs is a true oasis.

Below: Heading on to the Old Strzelecki.

Bottom: You can't miss the Pink Roadhouse at Oodnadatta.



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Miles and a Shaw thing

Adventure Rider Magazine columnist Miles Davis is another rider who built a ride around being in Alice Springs for the Finke Desert Race.

"Amate and I rode to Alice Springs to watch the Finke Desert Race and then cross the Simpson Desert," related BMW Motorrad's Marketing Manager. "The ride was ambitious and challenging at times, but it pretty much ran like clockwork.

"The dream was to ride the Simpson Desert via the French Line, but due to the high amount of Finke traffic across this route and the fact my riding mate, Dean 'Shawy' Shaw, was on his first adventure ride – he's an ultra-fit enduro and motocross rider – we decided to go for the longer but less-travelled route, via the French Line/Rig Road/WAA Line and down the Warburton Track to the Birdsville Track, then south to Mungeranie.

"In hindsight, this decision was spot on. We had a great, challenging ride with no incidents, while many riders pulled out of crossing The Simpson the same week for various reasons.

"I hope to get back and cross the French Line on the 1200GSA at a more suitable time with less traffic. It was my first trip to Finke and The Simpson, and it was a totally amazing experience. It's a huge, desolate country and a bike is an amazing way to experience it." **ADV**



Top left: Sunset on the Oodnadatta Track.



Top right: Dean Shaw (left) and author Miles Davis.

Bottom: The dunes begin.



RIDE STATS:

- ✓ Two riders (Miles on an R1200GSA and Shawy on an F800GS)
- ✓ Total distance 4000km over six full days of riding
- ✓ The Simpson Desert crossed unsupported, west-to-east, via the French Line, Rig Road, WAA Line and Warburton Track
- ✓ One night camped in the desert
- ✓ Simpson crossing: 659km between fuel stops (Mt Dare to Mungeranie), approximately 44 litres required on the 1200GSA and 38 litres for the F800GS. Additional fuel bladders were carried
- ✓ For the crossing, the riders combined carried about 12 litres of water
- ✓ Tyre pressures in the desert were approximately 12psi front and 20psi rear (0.9bar/1.5bar)
- ✓ The longest day was 900km
- ✓ The pair attended the 40th anniversary Tatts Finke Desert Race and camped at Finke on Sunday night
- ✓ No panniers, just a BMW roll bag on the back, tankbag and backpack. The pair saw a lot of riders who were overloaded and had a lot more problems because of this
- ✓ Tyres used were Continental TKC 80s on the F800GS and Continental TKC 80 and Metzeler Karoo 3 on the 1200
- ✓ Bikes were trailered from Melbourne to Broken Hill and back to save on highway riding and allow arrival at Broken Hill in the evening
- ✓ Due to unseasonably wet conditions the week prior, the Oodnadatta Track had just been reopened the day before the ride started. It was in pretty bad shape. The muddy ruts and floodways were especially treacherous from Lake Eyre to William Creek in the dark



Top left: Old Andado sand.



Top right: The start of The Simpson.

Main: The F800GS used around 38 litres of fuel.



Long-term

Triumph 800XCx Tiger

Last issue we outlined briefly the editor's ADVX ride, and how things didn't go all that well. The outcry from readers wanting to know more of the story has been loud and strident – to say the least – so here's a little more detail, straight from the horse's mouth... from one end of the horse, anyway.





Riding the Triumph 800XCx is always a thrill for me. I make no secret of my high regard for the bike. And ADVX! A ride like that must be a dream for any adventure rider. Imagine being sent as part of your work? Could things be any better than that?

Grab a coffee, sit back and get comfortable. There's no short way to tell this story.

Build it

I'd repeatedly said I was happy to ride the 2015 XCx stock, but there were some after-market fittings offered that would make the ride a lot easier and whole lot safer.

First up was a Safari tank, and not only did Robin Box supply the tank, he dropped

everything and spent some time fitting the 30-litre cell. In the process he 'fixed' some of the things I'd already fitted, and generally checked things over.

Barkbusters was next, and there's no time ever I'll say no to a set of Barkbusters on an adventure bike. In this case, the Aussie company had a model-specific set and also supplied the Blizzard weather protectors. That's the ultimate hand-protection set-up in my book.

Then it was Triumph Australia itself.

Mark Berger and Cliff Stovall, often mentioned in previous issues, were keen to add all kinds of things to the bike. Just about anything and everything from the Triumph catalogue was on offer, and when I rode the Tiger into Triumph's headquarters

in Melbourne they were a little disappointed at my not having a big list of goodies I wanted fitted to the bike. Cliff gave the 800 a once-over, cranked up the preload on the suspension to suit the heavy load a mammoth ride like ADVX required, then sent me out to ride the bike under the watchful eye of Mark B. Back in the workshop the bike was declared ready.

As soon as I wasn't looking someone fitted a gorgeous set of Triumph wide footpegs and some spare levers were slipped into the panniers. The accessories were much appreciated over the following two weeks, I can tell you.

Somewhere between the bike leaving Melbourne and arriving in Perth, a pair of ►

Main: The XCx is totally at home in the middle of nowhere. It's tough, versatile and a pleasure to ride in all situations.

Top: Ralph Baich with the bikes outside JCS Motorcycles in Perth. Ralph's bike was an XC.

Below: Petra and Howard at Motorrad Garage. Great people!

Bottom: The SW Motech crash bars supplied by Motorrad Garage offer excellent protection, especially for the radiator. They survived numerous gentle fallings over, and even after the kangaroo incident were still in good shape.





Mitas E-09s were slipped on, and they turned out to be a perfect choice for a tough crossing of the continent.

But wait...there's more

Triumph also had another rider on an 800XC who hadn't anyone in particular to ride with. Ralph Baich works for sister company

Monza Imports, so we were introduced by the Triumph guys and agreed to watch out for each other.

As a final build measure, Petra and Howard at Motorrad Garage in Perth insisted on a visit the day before the ride started. There was already some very nice SW Motech and Pyramid Plastics gear fitted to the bike as we've outlined in previous issues, but a new shipment of crash bars had just arrived and Howard and Petra wanted to set the bike up with a pair. The SW Motech crash bars are the only ones that protect the radiator, and while the Safari tank offered a certain amount of



cover, the crash bars are solid and could stay when the Safari tank was swapped back to the stocker.

Like Robin Box and the Triumph guys, Howard and Petra dropped everything and fitted the bars.

Well...Howard fitted the bars. Petra kept up the supply of muffins and coffee, which was equally important and very much appreciated.

Mmm...coffee...

Chain reaction

Ralph and I were underway early on Saturday morning, and the first big stop was a beach called Lancelin.



Top left: Ralph's bike wasn't in good shape. That's the instrument cluster and ECU hanging from a tree next to the bike. Ralph himself wasn't in much better condition.

Above top: The makeshift ramp designed to get the bike up on to the road train was a work of genius. It was still a gut-buster to get up there, though.

Above: Muzza, WA truckie and a dead-set, world-class champion. He didn't hesitate a second when the situation was explained. Thanks to his swift and decisive action the injured rider was delivered to care safely.

Left: Even with a clutch not at its best, the Tiger roared through to camp outside Warburton without any real problems.

This run along the sand proved challenging, and as I dashed about the place trying to photograph fallen bikes and massive dunes, the Triumph was treated with scant respect. It did more heavy-handed stops and starts than a female learner driver in her first attempt at a manual gearbox, and looking back I've no doubt I did a heap of revving and clutch-slipping in the deep, talcum-powder sand.

Later that morning, on a sandy track in the middle of nowhere, the bike was once again on the stand while I shot a few pics. But when it was time to get going, the bike refused to move.

The engine sounded fine, the gearbox engaged, but with the clutch out the bike was happy to idle in gear and remain stationary. A broken or derailed chain seemed the likely problem, but inspection proved that wasn't the case.

The clutch had 'gone'.

Cliff rescue

It looked as though my ride was over on the very first day. In fact, on the very first morning.

A check of the phone showed there was signal, and a call to Mark, then Cliff, at Triumph, reminded me that this wasn't the bike's first run in the sand. It'd had a spirited afternoon on Stockton Beach during the media release. None of the bikes had had any clutch trouble on that day, but they'd sure had a hammering. In fact, I couldn't recall a single clutch problem on the Tigers since I first rode one in 2011. And as I thought back through the morning I realised I could've unintentionally given the bike another big hammering...maybe a severe one.

Anyhoo, what was done was done. I dragged out the tool roll and Cliff talked me through some not-very-technical adjustments. In just a few minutes the bike was driving again and ready to take on the world. Hard acceleration or deep sand would start the clutch slipping, and there wasn't a millimetre of adjustment left anywhere, but it was rideable, and on bitumen and hard-pack it was easy to forget I'd done some damage.

"Just get it to Alice Springs," advised Cliff Stovall over the phone. "We'll have a new set of plates waiting."

All good

That meant, no matter what, the rest of the run would be done on the 'easy' sections. I wasn't too upset about that. The easy sections looked like great riding, and that's all a bloke lives for.

With Ralph and Cameron – on a BMW 1200GS, met at the Geraldton motel – we headed off for Meekatharra.

It was a pleasant and uneventful day. The Triumph, despite the abuse, sped along the bitumen and hard-packed dirt smoothly and sweetly, and in a classic case of bolting the stable door before counting how many chickens had hatched, I consciously was gentle with throttle application.

Not part of the plan


After a great camp east of Warburton we headed for Wyluna and Laverton. The dry road made for dusty riding, so everyone spread out.

About 150km past Wyluna, Ralph got into difficulty and both he and his 800 copped a great deal of damage.


The next five hours were unpleasant, and that's all that needs to be said.

Ralph was badly injured, his bike a mess, there was no mobile phone coverage, and we'd been told at briefing we may wait up to two days for a sweep vehicle. Ralph's injuries were such that I didn't think we had two days available. He needed help. After pulling up a few riders and asking them to try and get a message through to the event organiser, I flagged down a road train.


The driver, 'Muzza', didn't hesitate for a second. He drove the truck over to the edge of the road where there was a small dust windrow, and then built the most ingenious ramp ever. The bike was manhandled up on to the ►




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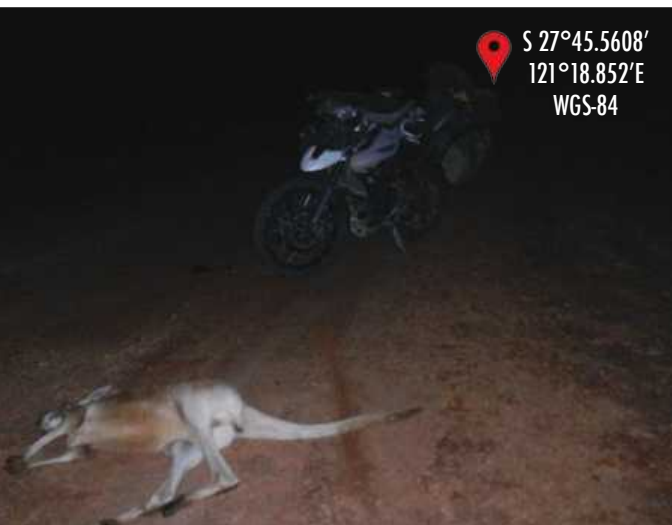
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Top: With the Tiger back on its wheels it was time to take stock. Our marsupial friend didn't survive.

Above: That 'roo hit hard. Thank goodness it didn't rain.

Above right: With the broken plastics stripped away and the creative use of the SW Motech GPS mount, a repair was effected. It lasted four days and 2000km or so across WA and the Northern Territory. Leaving the damaged beak there was optimistic. It didn't last long.

Below: The beginning of the Old Strzelecki Track at Merty Merty. The kangaroo was all but forgotten and the real fun riding about to begin.

trailer while Ralph made his unsteady way into the cab.

By that stage it was almost dark. The truckie said he would get Ralph to Leonora, the nearest town likely to have a medical service of some kind, 250km away. I went on ahead to organise what medical and accom I could for when the truck arrived.

The last thing Muzza said was, "You'd better be there to unload this bloke and that bike when I get there."

It was the last time I ever saw Ralph or the truck.

Sweep's take

I was following the course on the GPS which showed it would pass within about 50km of Leonora, so I thought it my best bet. The intersection with the Leonora turn was clear. Unbeknownst to me, the truck turned onto the bitumen not long after picking up

Ralph and the bike, so they weren't behind me when, travelling at a speed suited to the treacherous night-time conditions and pending emergency, the Triumph centrepunched a kangaroo about 50km further down the track. The bike and I went down like a ton of bricks.

It was while I was standing there, head still buzzing, contemplating the extensive damage to the front of the bike and the lifeless kangaroo, a LandCruiser with a trailer roared up and ADVX sweep driver Darren Hood catapulted from the cab.

"Do you know anything about an injured rider?" he asked. Then, taking in the scene, "Did you just hit that kangaroo?"

Once Ralph's situation had been explained, Darren turned his attention to the scene in front of him. Eyeing off the mangled front of the Triumph he pointed to the gauges hanging down by their electronics cable.

"That's the computer cable," he said.



"This bike will still run. You can complete the mission."

I tried to state my view that the 'mission', as I saw it, was to get the bike on the trailer and myself to the nearest airport, but while I was mumbling my way through that, Darren flicked the bike into neutral, hit the starter, and the mighty Tiger purred into life as though it hadn't a care in the world.

Next up Darren established I wasn't injured, pointed out a good camping spot, then, with me still making vague motions about having my own tiedowns, he leaped into the 'Cruiser and headed back the 350km to Carnegie along the hard route, from where he'd just come, to continue helping riders.

I rolled out my swag and waited for the morning.

Keep on keeping on

The front of the bike was a bit of a mess, and of course was well bent out of shape.

Whether or not anything serious was bent was a minor issue. The big problem was to secure the gauges so that, as Darren had pointed out, the cable couldn't chafe or fracture. There was a long, long stretch of dirt to be covered, so the gauges and cable had to be somehow fixed rock-solid.

Pulling away the debris from the front of the Triumph revealed a lot of smashed plastic and that the steel mount from the frame to the instrument cluster itself had broken on impact. The pieces were still there, in among the kangaroo guts and tufts of fur, and joined to one of the pieces was the SW Motech GPS mount. With a little creative bolting and fiddling the GPS mount made a fairly stable cradle that was roughly the right shape to hold the gauges. Darren had left a roll of duct tape he assured me was 'strong stuff', and using the tape to set things in place, then every zip-tie from my tool roll, then a length of cheapo Bunnings rope I carried 'just in case', I had the instrument cluster secure.

It was sticking out like a bullbar and facing the wrong way, but that was a minor detail.

I fired 'er up and started riding.

Team support

By the time the bike hit Laverton, around 200km later, it looked as if the makeshift repair might go the distance. A quick apologetic call to Triumph – again – explained the situation. Mark Berger's instruction was unambiguous: "If there's any risk to your safety, leave the bike there and get yourself home. We'll deal with it." That was the level of support Triumph Australia had kept up, without fail, since well before ADVX.

Then it was Cliff's turn: "Can you get the bike to Alice Springs?" he asked hopefully.

Alice was four days and 2000km away. There was only one way to find out.

D'oooooh

For the next few days the mighty Tiger purred along over the dirt roads of Western Australia and then the Northern Territory until at last, the clutch still holding on and the Barkbusters and SW Motech crash bars now among my favourite bits of gear, it launched onto the bitumen about 30km from Uluru.

It was a warm, glorious, sunny afternoon as, for the first time in days, I plonked my arse on the seat and relaxed. It looked as though everything would be fine.

That was when the rear tyre flapped, grabbed, and catapulted me and the bike off the road into the scrub. The first time.

Not to drag out the story, the second puncture about five kilometres later seemed a million-to-one shot, and the third one shortly after that finally made me have a proper look inside the tyre carcass. It meant removing the tyre, which was a pain, but proved worthwhile. The heat of the first



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Above: Three flats in quick succession. D'oh.

Left: The rim liner and tube melted into a solid mass in the time it took to pull up with the first puncture, a nail through the tread.

Right: A big sigh of relief was heaved on arriving at Alice Springs. Note the second-hand DR650 rear tyre. Rob Turton rolled out the grey carpet – that's the adventure-riding equivalent of the red carpet. Mitas had two new tyres waiting in the Tyres For Bikes truck.

puncture – the tyre had been smoking when I pulled up, and both tube and rim liner had melted into a single extrusion that resembled a large, black sex toy – had done some damage to the inside of the tyre wall.

A glance at the GPS showed 'Campground' about 15km ahead. Rather than camp by the road and wait two days for a sweep truck, I refitted the tyre and wheel, mounted up and

headed for what I hoped might be a barbecue table and a long-drop dunny.

By that stage there wasn't much tyre left. The wheel didn't look terrific, either. And the clutch was getting worse. In an effort to keep the tyre from melting, I rode in the bush beside the tarmac road, which was how the tyre managed to flick me again, this time into a nearby tree.

The remaining 15km took something over an hour, and it was with some relief Yulara, the 'campground' on the GPS, with all its luxury and phone reception, hauled into view.

"Can you please just get it to Alice," sighed Cliff Stovall in yet another phone call.

Rebuild

With no more tubes and a destroyed rear tyre there was no option but to wait for a sweep truck, and that meant a timely and much-needed rest day at the Yulara campground.

When the sweep did arrive late the next day the only tyre available was a second-hand from a DR650, and compared to the chunky Mitas E-09 that had been on the Tiger, it looked like something off a girl's tricycle. The only tube available was secondhand as well. "You'd better put some air in it and make sure it's not punctured too," advised Woodsie cheerfully in the failing light.

The tube was fine, and, seeming to almost defy physics, the tyre expanded to fit the rim. With fingers crossed I hit the road the following morning, cruising my bitumen way to Alice Springs.

Relief

On arrival at the home of the Finke Desert Race, everything seemed to fall miraculously





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into place. Rob Turton of Tyres For Bikes said hello and pointed out he had a couple of new tyres on board sent out by the Mitas guys. The folks at Desert Edge Motorcycles, the Alice Springs Triumph dealer, rolled a brand-spanking-new 800XCx off the showroom floor and began stripping parts off it and rebuilding the *Adventure Rider Magazine* bike – right down to making sure the blinkers worked – and, best of all, there was a package of clutch plates sitting on the counter with the my name on it.

Bless you, Triumph Australia!

One last hitch

With the bike back in good condition again – albeit still a little out of true and battle scarred in places – the rest of the day was spent doing basic maintenance like changing the air prefilter and oil.

By this stage the publisher had flown in and organised a room. There were clean sheets, hot showers and a slap-up feed at the event dinner all set for that evening. The publisher announced, “We’ll head down the bitumen to Finke in the morning!”

I figured that meant I could leave the clutch plates to fit the next evening at Finke, and get on with some work. I did the pressing maintenance and then shot some pics and recorded a few quotes at the dinner.

As everyone climbed on their bikes the next morning the publisher proclaimed, “I’ve spoken to John Hudson, and we’ll go down the Finke Access Track instead.”

A cold dread settled on my bowels.

I’ve done the Finke Desert Race a couple of times, and I’d been up and down that access track a few times. Even though it was part of the ADVX easy route, it’s not a ride to be taken lightly, or on a bike that deserves a little maintenance.

Sure enough, about 100km down that shitty, deep-dust, sand-sewer the damaged clutch of the Triumph finally refused its duty.

The trip back to Alice was glum and unpleasant.

All good

Back in the parking lot of the Alice Springs motel the new clutch plates were slipped into place and from then on the Triumph – and I – never looked back. With the bike back in good shape it shimmied and purred its way through the remaining 2500km like it was just warming up and looking for something to challenge it.

A going over by Triumph in the weeks after the event gave the bike a clean bill of health with no serious damage. Nothing was bent at all. Easing the tripleclamp bolts and axle allowed everything to be trued

RALPH RIDES AGAIN

Ralph made it back to Melbourne after a new set of challenges, and both he and his 800XC are well on the road to recovery. He’s a good bloke to have on a ride, and although ADVX didn’t go his way, I’m looking forward to sharing a new adventure with him again when he’s back on form. We banked enough great memories in a few days to bullshit our way through a heap of campfire yarns.

We wouldn’t want to waste an opportunity like that.



Above: Job done. Across Australia from the west coast to the east under less-than-ideal conditions. The Tiger 800XCx will be rated as ‘super tough’ from now on.

up. Even the ‘bars didn’t need replacing. A beak, a new mudguard and a good service had the Tiger ready to do it all again. Even the Mitas tyres fitted in Alice were still in good shape. They could easily have gone the whole distance.

There’s a long list of things I love about the Triumph Tiger XCx, and now, right at the top, is that it’s one very tough, strong, beautifully made adventure bike.

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DESIGNS

A couple of mates in South Africa

Adventure Motorcycle Equipment's Darin Rowley grabbed the chance for a ride in South Africa. In a twist, loose planning was a big plus.

Words and images: Darin 'Baldy' Rowley

Alan 'Blue' Henriksen was on the phone with a perceptible edge of excitement in his voice. As Blue was generally uncontactable through electronic media, it could mean only one thing: he must've had a grouse idea for a ride. Excellent.

The organisation

The phone pleasantries were wrapped up in three seconds and Blue finally got to the point. It went something along the lines of, "Hey you little bald-headed bike-riding menace, I'm in South Africa in late May. Why don't you get your arse there too? We can hire a couple of F800GSs and go for a wander."

Instant answers came into my mind that can be summarised as, 'I can't because of every fat, middle-aged, white-bastard, first-world problem excuse I could think of'. But that felt a bit lame. So, I answered Blue in my deep, masculine, Rambo-style voice, "Yeah. I'm in".

Further details were sorted out in a number of one-line emails.

Getting started

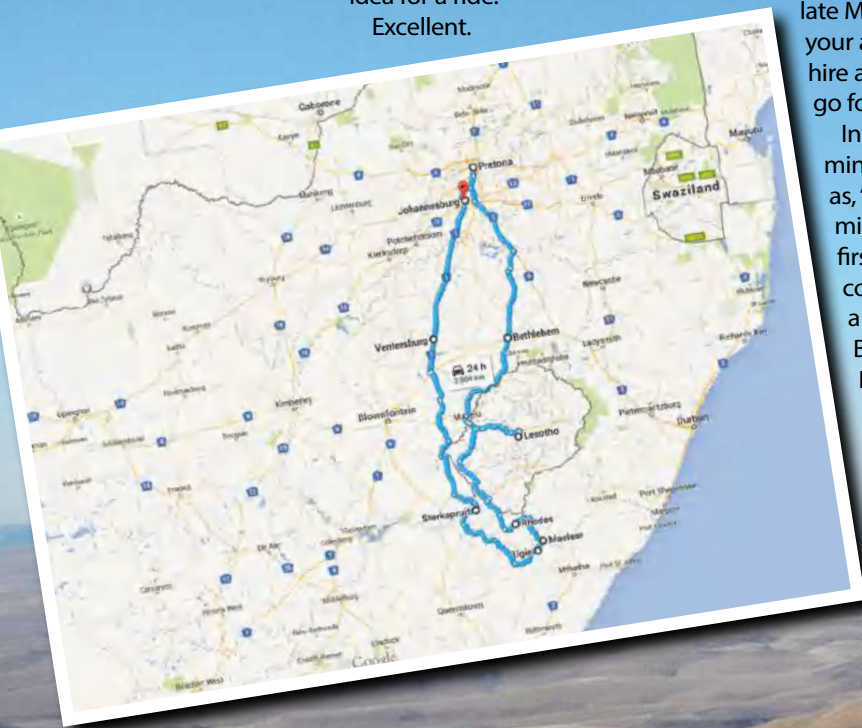
When the time came we were sitting on a pair of Motorrad Executive rental F800GSs in Pretoria, South Africa, ready to head off into the wild blue yonder.

We looked at each other and Blue said, "We probably didn't need the third roady last night, did we? Which way are we going?"

I cracked up laughing as several events from bike trips we'd shared over the past 25 years or so flashed through my mind.

"Let's head to the highest mountains," I suggested.

We fired up the bikes, programmed the GPS not to put us on main roads, blipped the throttle for peace of mind, grinned like a pair of under-aged teenagers with their first case of beer and a box of condoms, and rode off with unknown horizons beckoning.





Rhodes rules

During the first few kilometres, the typical personal insecurities of any adventure ride manifested themselves. What if..?

South Africa had a reputation for land pirates. Some of the animals considered humans food. We didn't have a gun. We had a South Africa map very loosely marked with crosses showing areas not to go and ticks on areas which were 'safe'. This was done at the bar and during the signing of the F800GS rental agreements, so we had no real plan of where we were going, and therefore no one else knew where we were.

With all the negative possibilities out, I started thinking, 'Let's enjoy this! There are 50 million people in an area the size of NSW and Victoria. It can't be that dangerous, or else these people wouldn't be alive. As long as we exercise a bit of common sense, we can deal with whatever pops up'.

A quick crank of the throttle had the

Beemer motors singing, and that made me remember, 'Damn it. I still haven't paid that speeding ticket in Spain'.

Programming the GPS not to take motorways had us feeling very white and vulnerable in the back streets of Johannesburg. After about 40km of traffic and keeping our eyes peeled, we were out in the countryside chewing up some road miles. It was delightful not to have to worry about traffic infringements. Apparently, road rules are just guidelines in South Africa.

We arrived in Bethlehem just on dark to find guesthouse accommodation, food and beer at good, clean, value for money.

Getting in the groove

The next morning was crisp, clear and filled with trees showing their autumn colours as we departed Bethlehem for the country of Lesotho.

Lesotho has the biggest

Main: The Naudes Neck mountain pass. At 2500m it shows some far horizons.

Above left: The author planning a day's riding.

Above right: Getting started with F800GS rentals in Pretoria.

mountains in South Africa and is populated by the Sotho people who still lead their traditional lifestyles. We ended up taking an old track into Lesotho, crossing the border at a slippery river crossing where the GS had a lay down.

We rode through the northern part of Lesotho marvelling at the escarpment scenery and the friendliness of the locals. The border crossing leaving Lesotho was unmanned and we flew through at a fair rate of knots. We may have had some issues at this checkpoint as we'd entered the country without a visa or passport, so we considered ourselves lucky and motored on.

Zulu

We wicked up the throttles and proceeded south through a patchwork of friendly Zulu communities, agricultural land, pine plantations and escarpment country. As luck would have it, we happened upon the White Mountain Lodge just on dark and it provided superb amenities and fluffed pillows for us weary motorcycle riders.

The highlight of the White Mountain Lodge stay was joining a Zulu birthday party. Those Zulus seem to absorb the music and then release it in completely choreographed booty shaking. My hamstrings were sore from just watching. It was great to have been a part of it.

Mountain passes

Again completely refreshed, and with perfect blue skies, we motored south to Rhodes. ▶



The route to Rhodes took us over Naudes Neck, a superb mountain pass that required the GS traction control to be turned off for the mandatory toothy-grinned powerslides. The 800 motor was singing – albeit a little wheezy – as the air became thinner and the wind was howling strong enough to blow the bikes completely off line. The view and feel at Naudes Neck, about 2500m up, is what adventure riding is about. We could see the unknown horizons beckoning, and we were free to explore them. We soaked up the view and bee lined it down the rocky dirt roads and again found good accommodation just on dark. That rejuvenated us for more riding.

The Indian Ocean

Another beautiful crisp morning awaited us the next day. We looked at the map and thought, 'Let's have a coffee at Coffee Bay on the Indian Ocean.'

Our route took us down through large spaces of escarpment country and into the area where Nelson Mandela was born.

The fig and blue-cheese pizza at the Stone Junction Cafe in MaClear was a superb refreshment for a weary traveller. Further south towards Mthata the scenery



became a hopscotch of funny little round and rectangle houses in different colours. These were the homes of tribal people and all sorts of things were flying onto the potholed dirt roads. It was a relief to get to the White Clay guest house right on the beach of the Indian Ocean, wash the dust out of the throat with a cold bevvy, and sate the hunger with some local seafood.

After another leisurely breakfast the next morning we headed north along a number of dirt roads with open scenery in all directions. We saw lots of tribal shepherds tending their flocks and had to keep waving to excited children.

Once we got to the top of the escarpment near Ugie, we were amazed at the difference. We were certainly in white-man's land with first-world agricultural and forestry practices in place.

The escarpment geographic border may as well have been a country border. A little oasis of a café – The Cock And The Cat café – provided a superb meal in a relaxing environment.

Top left: Heading through Lesotho (passports and visas not shown).

Middle left: The White Clay Guesthouse couldn't get much closer to the ocean.

Left: South African high country.

Below: None of the dirt rides are very technically difficult.

Top right: White Mountain Lodge in Lesotho. A good place to re-hydrate.



The blast back

We headed through Elliot and over the Barkly Pass on bitumen. It was bloody great fun! The GSs were on the stops, the sweepers and road surface were perfect and the huge relief of the escarpment scenery under a clear blue sky was superb. We pulled up at Sterkspruit to find it was very obviously a Sotho-people-only community. We managed to rent a house and slept with the motorcycles in the lounge room after being advised to do so.

The 'out of sight out of mind' ploy worked, and we got going early in the morning. We didn't look back on this stop. I don't think a Leatherman held by my stumpy little arm would have been much defence against a gun.

Luxury

Time was running out as we punched north at high cruising speeds up a network of bitumen and gravel roads towards Johannesburg and we happened on a five-star farm stay called Die Kuierhuis, west of Ventersburg. We were spoilt with old-world hospitality from Andrius and Amanda who offered absolutely tasty home-cooked meals, serenity, and great accommodation. All this at really good value for money. It was our last night on the trip and we couldn't have thought of a better way to spend it.

We awoke to some great coffee and a first-class breakfast, then motored trouble-free into Johannesburg where we returned our noble steeds to Motorrad Executive Rentals.

The journey home began, and before we knew it we were in our respective homes and domestic lives.

ADV

IN SUMMARY

- ✓ South Africa offers superb adventure riding, scenery and diverse cultures
- ✓ Motorcycle riders do not appear to be targets of violent crime
- ✓ Most people speak reasonable English or better
- ✓ There wasn't a lot of wildlife where we travelled and that made for safe roads. The nearest miss was running over a meerkat, ducking under some bush turkeys and an evil look from an Alpha male baboon
- ✓ We covered 2600km in six days, roughly half of which was dirt
- ✓ We mainly required intermediate-level riding skills. Tar roads were generally better than Australian roads
- ✓ We couldn't fault the BMW F800GS
- ✓ Hard luggage secures gear
- ✓ A South African salad is chicken
- ✓ Don't attempt to explain a vegetarian meal, let alone order one
- ✓ We spent about AUD\$130 per day for fuel, restaurant food, accommodation and beer
- ✓ Bikes were about AUD\$1200 each for seven days with a GPS, hard luggage and top insurance cover
- ✓ We mostly used our credit cards for purchases
- ✓ Take dental floss as you'll have meat stuck in your teeth
- ✓ South Africa can be ridden without too much planning
- ✓ There is a massive difference between white and black South African cultures
- ✓ This was a nine-day trip with all connecting travel included
- ✓ If you want to do it, make it happen



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ADVENTURE RIDER MAGAZINE

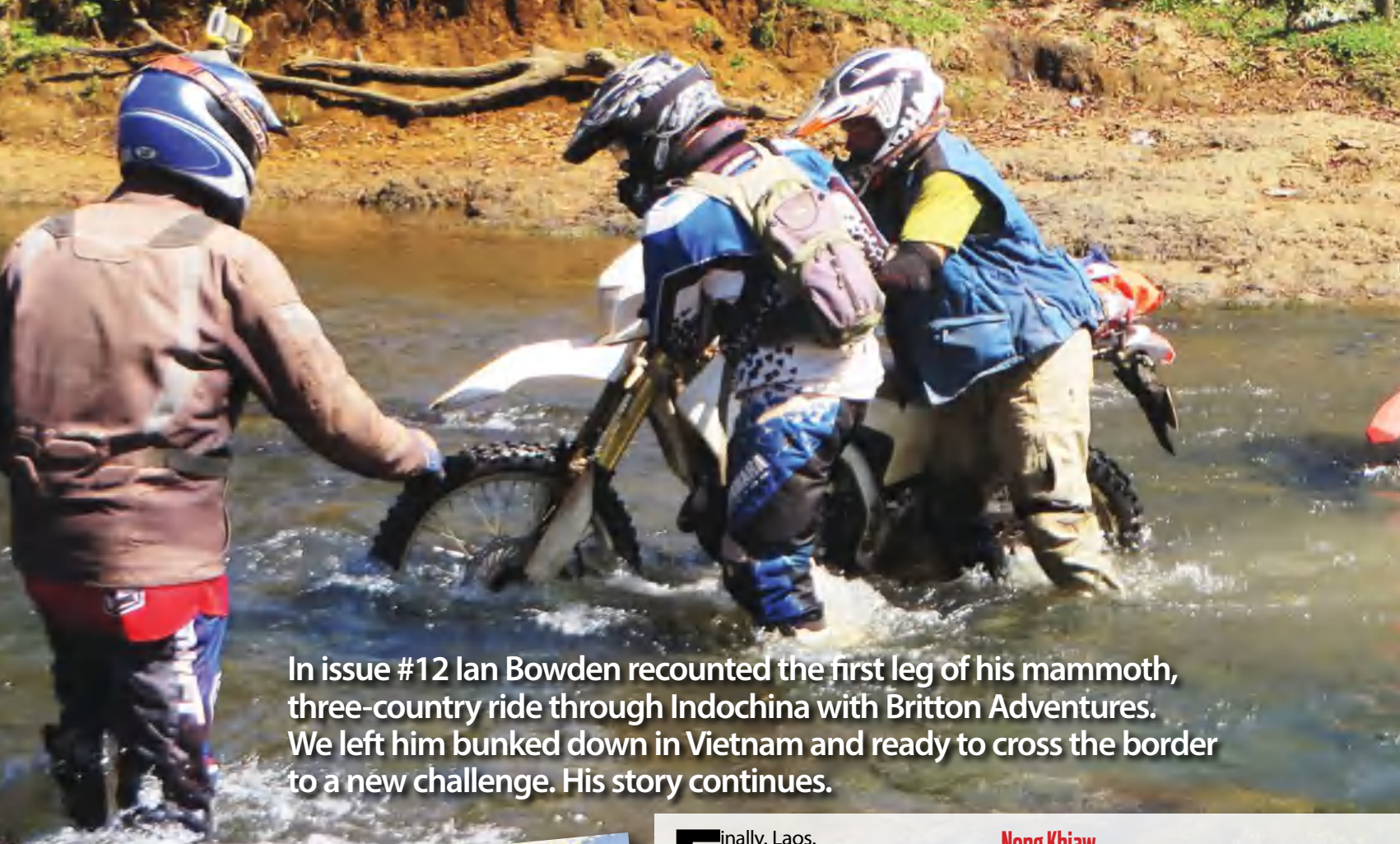
"This was taken on Walkers Crossing between Innamincka and Birdsville," Dallas O'Sullivan explained. "Myself on the Tiger 800XC and my best mate Ben on his 690. We left north-east Victoria and went to Birdsville across the Simpson Desert via the French Line, up to Finke and Alice Springs, then up the Tanami to Halls Creek, the Gibb River Road and across to Derby. From there we followed the coast to Perth and across the Nullarbor to home. We're already planning next year's trip." Geez. That's a big ride. Dallas scores an *Adventure Rider Magazine* T-shirt for sharing the pic and the story. You could win one, too. Send your pic, and some information about it and yourself, to tom@maynemediamedia.com.au. **ADV**



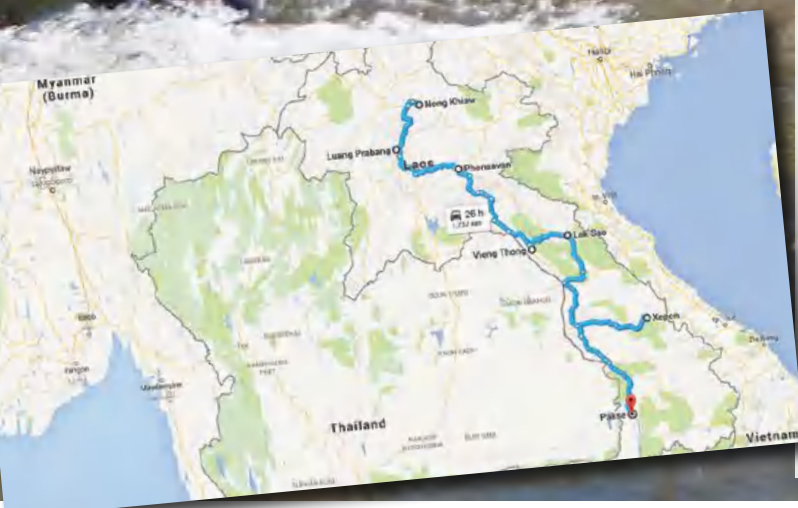
Indochina part 2

Laos: The hidden gem

Words and images: Ian Bowden



In issue #12 Ian Bowden recounted the first leg of his mammoth, three-country ride through Indochina with Britton Adventures. We left him bunked down in Vietnam and ready to cross the border to a new challenge. His story continues.



Finally. Laos. I'd been told years before I would love riding the ex-French colony, and I did. The riding was the best I'd experienced in Asia, and the food, people, and landscape were first class.

We crossed the border from Vietnam to find a line of CRF250s and our eager Laotian crew waiting: Thongkhon, Yee, and Quang. After greetings and a briefing we hit the road on a clear fine day – weather we enjoyed for the next 12 days.

Nong Khiaw

It didn't take long to get into a rhythm and we were soon bounding along at a good pace with 280km to our destination, Nong Khiaw. The first thing we noticed was the roads were much quieter, which made sense. There were only seven million people living in Laos compared to the 90-odd million in Vietnam.

It turned out to be a long, hot day and we didn't get to Nong Khiaw until after dark due to Mike



dozens of smiling children running, yelling and waving at us. This carried on all day.

After another big day of mainly dirt, we arrived at beautiful Luang Prabang, and, needless to say, we needed a few ice-coldies on arrival. A great meal at a top local French restaurant, and a few ideas on what to do on the coming rest day, capped off a great run. ►

Main: It was safer to walk the bikes across this river crossing on the Southern Ho trail.

Map: The second stage of a three-country ride. This time running Laos from north to south.

Above: The author enjoying a cold beer during a cruise down the Mekong River.

Below: The mountains of northern Laos are breathtakingly beautiful.

getting a puncture, but the riding was great. The dirt sections were dusty, unlike the damp conditions we'd experienced in Vietnam, and that night quite a few Beer Laos were needed to lubricate the dry throats. Beer Lao is a nice drop and has won top awards in Asia.

We slept well in our riverside cottages.

Luang Prabang

We turned off the asphalt early the next day and had a taste of the country's fantastic riding. The pace on the first ridge track through the jungle was hot, with our lead rider Thongkhon setting a good pace until he overcooked it a bit and ran off into the scrub. There was no harm done, and after a few laughs we carried on, though Craig, Terry, and myself backed off a little to give him a bit more space. Not long after that I saw him slide to a quick stop to avoid a huge snake.

The ride was getting interesting.

We rode through mountain villages with





After breakfast the next morning it was decided to hire a river boat to cruise down the Mekong, then get a tuk tuk to pick us up and take us to the Kouang Si waterfalls. We took a bucket of Laos' best on ice, and away we went. The cruise was great and scenery fantastic. It was a good relaxing day and we finished in another top restaurant – the food in this place was fantastic and some of the best I'd ever eaten.

The Plain Of Jars

The following day's destination was Phonsavan, which lies in the heart of the most cluster-bombed province of the most bombed country on earth.

The bombing statistics of this landlocked country 30 years ago, during the so-called 'secret war', are mind-boggling. Laos was hit by an average of one B-52 payload every eight minutes, 24 hours a day, between 1964 and 1973 – that's nine years! US bombers dropped more ordnance on Laos in this period than was dropped during the whole of the Second World War. Of the 260 million cluster 'bombies' that rained down, particularly on Xieng Khouang province, 80 million failed to explode, leaving a deadly legacy that's still killing today. Deaths total some 13,000 to date. These people were killed digging in fields contaminated with live bombs. Laos hasn't the resources to clean up this mess, but fortunately a lot of foreign countries are helping. We saw clean-up efforts going on and visited a UXO (unexploded ordnance) centre. After that we weren't keen to go truffle hunting.

The ride to Phonsavan was all bitumen, something like 280km of endless corners. It was fantastic riding, and with so many corners we got dizzy – it was motorcycling heaven.

We arrived at the renowned Plain Of

Jars later in the day.

The Plain Of Jars is a huge plateau where mysterious, huge, bottle-shaped stone pots were discovered. Many of the jars are still intact despite the heavy bombing, and it's unknown what they were used for. Our guide gave us two theories, one for putting bodies in, and the other for storing rice whiskey.

Rice whiskey got our vote.

Toy run

We were up early the next day, ready for a big day's riding on the dirt to the small town of Vieng Thong, well off the tourist trail. We'd been warned there could be delays due to explosives being used on the development road we were taking, and they were using explosives, alright.

We came across huge rocks blown apart on the road as we climbed into the cool mist-covered mountains, but there were no delays that morning, apart from a few stops to give gifts of toys to the village children on the way. They were very poor and didn't have much, so they really appreciated this.

Gun rider

The riding in the morning was great but got even better in the afternoon as we dropped down from the mountains and into the dense foliage.

There were plenty of hoots of joy as we sped through the jungle until we rounded a corner mid-afternoon to find heavy



Top: The team beside a large hydro lake on the road to Xepon.

Left: The unexploded ordnance centre in Saravane province convinced us not to go looking for truffles.

Below left: Where to cross? The Southern Ho Chi Minh trail.

Top right: Some of the bridges were a bit suspect. There were plenty worse than this one.

Right: Enjoying a cooling dip at the Tad Lor waterfalls.



machinery working. Lead rider Yee was busy looking for a way through and ignored a security guard with an AK47 trying to stop us. I just followed hoping not to get shot. We had to stop though, as there was no road. They don't use red flags over there. AK47s are more effective.

After a few words we waited 45 minutes for the digger to clear a way down a steep bank and link back on to the track below.

Not long afterwards we popped out of the jungle and onto a nice bitumen road with sweeping curves that soon brought out the road racer in us, and there were no chicken strips on our dirt tyres when we arrived at Vieng Thong.

The only casualty on this day was a chicken I vaporised at high speed. They're sillier than sheep! The count was mounting with four confessed so far. We'd had plenty of close calls with dogs, ducks, ►



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geese, and pigs, but the chickens weren't faring well.

Scott's backing-in

We had a 7.00am start the next morning to allow a deviation to the Konglor Cave. A very scenic road had us there mid-morning, and we had a short wait before getting kitted up with headlights and life jackets. Then it was into long boats – with about 25mm of freeboard – fitted with long-shaft motors for an 8km blast in the dark through the very spectacular cave with a river running through it. It turned out to be well worth the deviation. I'd been to a couple of these limestone caves with rivers in Asia, and this one rated right up there.

We then had to backtrack some 30km to

the turnoff to Lak Sao, the day's destination.

A slippery section of polished tar had me and Terry backing off, recognising the slickness – Scott did not!

In hot pursuit of the Yee man (the name we gave Yee), and thinking he was a supermotard rider, he backed it in. The trouble was, it was on the deck skidding through the corner looking back at us.

Top marks to Scott for not giving up, though. He didn't let go and still had his hand on the throttle when he stopped on the edge of a big drain. A stunned Scott was okay and so was the bike. There were just a few minor scrapes to man and machine.

We continued on this scenic ride incident-free to the Phouthavong Hotel in Lak Sao.

Old campaigners

As we headed south the next morning it became warmer and dryer, and just as the riding on a rough dirt road was

Above: This crossing on the Southern Ho trail was far preferable to the carrying and pushing.

Below left: It was a hot day on the trail. Alison sucking in the H2O.

Below: Bad line selection by Thongkhon across a bog on the Ho trail left him a little soiled. The rest of us knew where not to go, at least.

Top right: A Russian SAM missile used to shoot down American B-52 bombers from Laos during the conflict.

Below right: A bombed bridge on the Ho Chi Minh trail on the route to Tad Lor.





getting interesting we suddenly broke out onto a new asphalt road through an area which had been flooded to create a large hydro lake. It was very scenic, but the dirt road was ruined by progress.

Rounding a corner I was surprised by a large group of monkeys on the road. That's not something we see at home.

We stayed on this road until we passed the dam then dropped down into another valley and back onto the dirt. It was red dust just like Australia – rough, rutty and bumpy, but great. Alison, a very accomplished rider who hadn't done a lot of off-road work, eagerly took on board tips to cope with the terrain. She was soon standing up and going well. Not shy of using the throttle, she had the little four-stroke buzzing.

After a long 300km, two punctures and a loose muffler on dusty, rough, dirt roads in the heat, we arrived parched at Xepon. The iced beers went down very quickly as we sat on the front steps of the hotel.

Ho Chi Minh Trail

After a good night's sleep we were ready for the promised Ho Chi Minh Trail's river crossings and jungle trails in the Bolaven Plateau region. Fortunately it was still dry, as rain would have made rivers and the trail impassable in places.

It didn't disappoint. We had a fantastic full day of dry riding, slippery jungle trails, soft sand, mud, rickety wood-plank bridges and river crossings next to the remains of large bridges bombed in the secret war. A basic barge was used to cross one river that was too deep to ride. We passed through remote villages of friendly ►



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people, and we stopped often in these villages for drinks and a chat, and then had lunch in one.

What a day! It was the best riding to date, and was made up of a full day of serious off-road. Around 180km later we sat around a large table in the shade at the picturesque Tad Lor resort, washing the dust away with cold beers and reliving the day's ride.

Southern Ho

A late start the next day kicked off with a leisurely ride to the waterfalls for a cooling dip. We then rode to Attapeu on good roads, and once we'd arrived there was an option to visit a small town 30km away where a Russian SAM missile was on display, and most took the option.

Our last day on the bikes dawned fine, which was great and meant we could ride our preferred option, the southern Ho Chi Minh Trail. This turned out to be the most challenging riding we'd done, and the best. We were on the trail at 8.00am and didn't arrive in Pakse till 5.00pm. It was only 116km of serious dirt and 50km of road, so that gives some idea of the nature of the terrain.

The riding started easy enough, then we entered the jungle. It was damp and slippery under the tree canopy. The numerous river crossings were deep and, even though we walked the bikes through most of them, two bikes took

Above: The river crossing was thanks to the Americans for bombing the bridge.

Left: Thongkoon, our guide, a little uneasy with the AK47 security guard at jungle roadworks.

Below left: The Khone Falls on the Mekong in the south of the country.

Top right: A Mitre 10 store, Laos style. Everything any regular hardware store would stock was available.

Bottom right: Alison, Scott and Greg rehydrating at a small village on the way to Attapeu.

in lungfull and had to be dewatered.

One very deep crossing fortunately had a basic pull raft to get us across. Others had derelict rafts that were unusable. There were plenty of deep, smelly, muddy ruts. It was awesome riding that suited the bikes well.

Again we passed through remote villages and often stopped to say hello or buy a drink at the small shops. The village children were always keen to see us.

After the last big crossing we pulled up for a late lunch in a village food stop with a dirt floor. It was very basic and simple, and the food they cooked for us was fantastic and very tasty. Fed and watered, we took on the last 30km of rough, dusty trails before getting onto the road for a 50km blast to Pakse.

We watched the sun set over the Mekong from our hotel bar.



The Mekong

Our final day in Laos was a rest day...sort of.

The itinerary said: 'Relax in our minivan as we drive to Si Phan Don.'

Huh? Relax?

I needed a kidney belt as we bounced along a very undulating road. It bought home to me why we ride bikes in these countries and don't travel in buses. I'll never take that option if it can be avoided.

The day was interesting, visiting the 4000 Islands, a group of beautiful islands on the Mekong River, and nearby was the largest waterfall in Southeast Asia. We checked out the ruins of the old rail system that was used to get freight past the falls and had a lovely meal overlooking the Islands.

After lunch it was into a longboat to check out the rare freshwater dolphins found there, then it was a bouncy ride back to Pakse and a great meal at a rooftop restaurant overlooking the city to end our Laos tour.

We'd travelled 2200km on the bikes in Laos, riding the length of the country from north to south. It was fantastic riding and well worth the effort of making it happen. Did I mention how good the food was?

Our adventure wasn't over yet though, we had one more country to go.

See the conclusion of this three-country tour in the next issue – Cambodia: Temple Central.

ADV



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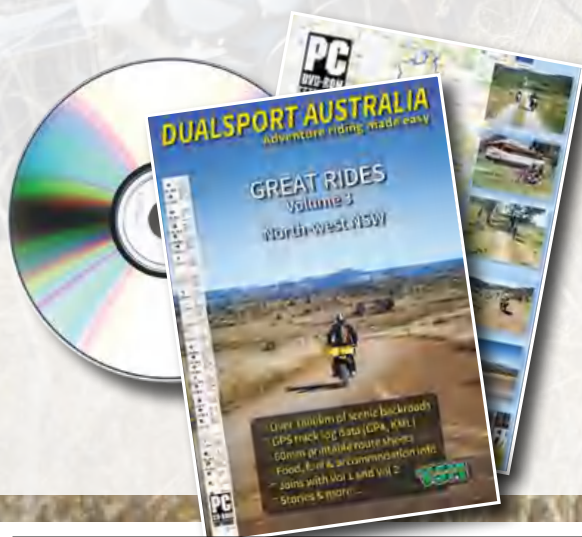
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Highlights

Words and images: Marty Blake

The third disc in the DualSport Australia series has just hit our desks, and it's another screamer. As we were making plans to carve off a day or two of 'product research' we started wondering if DualSport Australia's Marty Blake had any favourite roads or landmarks in the thousands and thousands of kilometres he'd ridden finding these incredible places. So we asked him. He reckoned it was more about special memories than specific places or trails. Here's what he told us.

I always think riding is great, no matter where or when. Often it's special events or happenings that make individual rides or locations stick in my mind. Sometimes they're good things. Sometimes not. Here's a few that spring to mind as I write this.



RACECOURSE TRAIL: VOLUME I - THE GREAT DIVIDE

I'm a believer in signs, not only road signs, but the subtle signs the bush throws up, like cow shit indicating stock on the road. Never was this truer than on a loop with mates Phil and Wolfy.

An early start from Gingers Creek saw us on Cobcroft Road. It's 'roo central, and after 14 near misses in the first 10km I'd slowed our pace to a crawl. Wolfy pulled up, complained about the lack of forward momentum, questioned my ability and manhood, dismissed my claims of dangerous wildlife, and, as he hadn't seen any, zoomed ahead. He'd made it almost 100m when he was jumped by a 'roo. It brushed his front wheel, almost taking him down. He retreated in behind with little to say.

Phil was also sick of my woossing, so he stopped briefly to get clear track and then cut loose, unfortunately overcooking a tight, loose corner and coming down hard.

At the next regroup, as Phil surveyed all the gouges in his new bike and helmet, Wolfy, being the elder statesman, pointed out it was the last day in a long ride. We'd been relatively lucky considering all the drama, he said, and it was time to take note of the signs. We should slow down and get home safely.

We all agreed and pushed on slowly for around 10km until we saw another sign: Racecourse Trail. It was obeyed. All previous worries were forgotten. Racecourse Trail's superb, tight, undulating, leafy trail had us all in a happy place, throttles held on, jostling for position and laughing like loons up and down hills, across small creeks and railing the many beautiful corners which set the tone for the rest of the day.

Some trails never seem as good when you go back, but Racecourse Trail just gets better and better with every visit.



CELLS RIVER ROAD: VOLUME I - THE GREAT DIVIDE

Cells River Road is so spectacular it can be distracting.

On a recent trip with a fair-sized crew we were moving along smoothly, looking forward to a break and a swim. There are several gates to open and close, and I was dropping riders at each one. They were to open the gate, then close it when the sweep caught them up and waved them on. The first gate went to Cain, our resident doctor, then Tom our resident editor, followed by Phil and then Mean Dean.

The views opened out and the narrow, grassy road, clinging to the hillside, twisted and turned its way down into the valley. It was all too much fun.

In the valley a particularly sunny spot called out for a regroup, so we stopped and waited.

I had a little trouble with my chain, and while I was contemplating the repair, Dave and Karen Ramsay turned up with a new joining link, so everything was looking good. The only trouble was, Dave was sweep. We were missing everyone who should've been in front of him and behind me.

Phil had already wised up something was wrong and backtracked. The whereabouts of Tom and Cain were a mystery. The road was

fenced, and there was no alternative route, but those two professionals were nowhere to be found.

I was in disbelief. How could they be missing?

I backtracked, trying to make time on the tight corners. I found Dean either half-in or half-out of his onesie, but he hadn't moved from where I'd left him. I opened and closed gates and backtracked 60km, all the way to Gingers Creek. There was no sign of the missing pair.

Time was getting away. I gave up looking for Tom and Cain and started collecting riders as we raced down the valley. The spectacular views were ignored as we picked the best lines through the endless corners, regrouped and headed out of the valley. When we finally popped out of the communications black hole we found a text message waiting.

Tom and Cain were safe after deciding to open and close gates themselves to get off the course, then map a new route into Gloucester after a particularly nasty downhill removed retreat as an option. At least Tom got a couple of swims in the creek (with his bike).

If you have to do a road three times in a frantic search for missing riders, Cells River Road is the one to do. The ride's so good you won't care. ▶



TOMALIA ROAD: VOLUME I - THE GREAT DIVIDE

Barrington Tops has always felt like riding in a movie to me. The scenery and roads all seem too perfect. The crisp, cool, air highlights the senses, the alpine forests and dark pine complement the cool air, and maybe because I had to go in mid-winter one time, I couldn't find any volunteers and had to ride alone. I didn't care.

Tomalia Road had me beaming, the temperature had risen and the bright winter sun seemed to throw a whole new light on things. Not having to keep a group moving meant I didn't have to hurry, and I had time to sit and drink it all in.

Usually I had time for a quick glance, a photo or two, then I had to keep pushing on. But not this time.

One babbling brook proved irresistible. These settings often tug at your heart as you pass, but, on my own, I stopped and relaxed in the sun, shedding a few layers and enjoying real freedom.

The road changes its name a few times, but the experiences stay the same and by the time I finally dragged myself out of the valley I was a firm fan of riding solo, especially if the scenery is perfect and the riding is as good as it gets...like it is on Tomalia Road.



THE PILLIGA - VOLUME 2 - CENTRAL NSW

I'd heard whispers of incredible riding in the Pilliga forest after rain, but I'd never experienced it.

Pilliga is way more fun than the straight lines on the map imply. The sand tugs at the bike's front wheel and demands a throttle-on approach. I loved the Pilliga just as it was.

On one recce ride I'd tolerated icy-cold rain between Hill End and Coonabarabran and it set up an experience I'll never forget.

The challenging black-soil roads of the day before were gone and Pilliga had turned into one incredible, loamy playpen, and I had it all to myself. The DR seemed to gain extra suspension and plushness as it roosted the corners, leaving chocolate-brown lines drawn in graceful arcs.

The smoothness, the way the bike steered and turned so easily, railing the usually soft berms built up on the corners, and the feeling of being able to get away with anything was unbelievable.

The Pilliga in the dry is great riding, but in the wet, on that day, it was heaven.





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FINDING BARRABA: VOLUME 2 - CENTRAL NSW AND VOLUME 3 - NORTH WEST NSW

When thinking of special happenings on fantastic roads, Barraba is always in the mix. I've done a lot of riding through the area these days, but there was one ride, right back at the beginning of the DualSport Australia journey, that sticks in my mind.

Editor Tom had scored a tricked-out DR650 from Jay Foreman, owner and manager of the Suzuki-Motul motocross team. It was built with all the resources of the Suzuki race team and was really special.

Tom, Phil and I headed west, with a soak in the Burren Junction bore as our goal.

Unfortunately, 20km past Guyra a kangaroo jumped Tom and sent bike and rider down in a sickeningly high-speed tumble. Phil saw the whole thing. One bounce from a high bank, then wham! Tom didn't even see it coming.

With an unconscious Tom in the middle of the road, and me riding off into the distance, Phil did well. A ute turned up, so we threw the patient – now pleading he was alright – and bike into the ute and headed for Guyra Hospital. The medicos took one look at him, strapped him to a backboard and neck brace and rushed him to Armidale Hospital. Then they got up us for bringing him in (we should have hit SOS on the SPOT, apparently). The doctors explained we should never trust someone who doesn't know where he is.

The trouble with that was, Tom never knows where he is. He works from home because he can't be trusted to find his way to an office.

Common sense would've seen Phil and I head for home. We'd lost a rider and half a day. But we decided to ride on and made it to the bore just before dark.

In order to check on our fallen comrade, the next morning we drew a straight line on the map and headed for Armidale. This unexpected route took us straight through Barraba, and the undulating granite roads turned out to be sensational. That ride through Barraba stayed with me, and since then I've been back many times, and that route featured on Disc Two.

I was peeved I didn't get to ride that amazing DR650 before it was destroyed, but that was offset with a whole new riding area found. Barraba never disappoints, and finding the route that way makes sure I'll never forget it.

ADV

Aprilia Caponord Rally

A very rewarding riding experience.

Aprilia is a company that prides itself on building high-performance sports bikes. The list of World Superbike championships and MotoGP involvement figures highly in all its company material. And justifiably so.

But what happens when a company with that kind of focus and heritage decides to enter the adventure market?

The Caponord Rally happens. It's a beautiful mix of today's current thinking combined with Italian styling and some very high-performance innovation.

Looking good

There's no doubting the Caponord is something different. Just looking at the bike makes a rider start thinking, "Whoa! What have we got here?"

What we have is an 1197cc, liquid-cooled, DOHC, four-valves-per-cylinder, 90-degree V-twin in a very sleek and sexy package. The bike looks good in a stylish and understated way, and has performance to match.

In excess of 100hp seems to be mandatory in the big bikes these days, and Aprilia ensured the Caponord matches up. The spec sheet gives the bike 125hp, which is impressive, and claims a dry mass of 247kg, which is about normal in this class of bike.

Triumph's Explorer comes in at just under 260kg dry and BMW's GSA around 260kg fuelled. KTM's 1190 manages a svelte 210kg or so.

The electronics are well up to par as well, with ride-by-wire throttle, cruise control, three levels of traction control plus 'Off', three rider maps – Tour, Sport and Rain – switchable ABS and



a very interesting suspension set-up that we'll present more fully elsewhere.

On a less mystical level the Caponord feels slim and very comfortable. There's a bare and naked look to the cockpit that belies all the technology making things happen, and that seamless, uncluttered feel extends throughout the whole bike. It appears a beautifully simple, elegant machine with smooth curves, and the seating is clearly designed for covering long distances and feeling great about it.

All up, the Caponord feels like it's built to let the rider enjoy the ride without having to cope with intrusion of high-tech gadgets and flashy gewgaws...even though it's at the leading edge of current bike technology.

It's a beautifully presented bike, top to bottom.

Ride away

Snicking into gear and heading off into traffic was, we have to say, a little disappointing. The bike was smooth and easy, geared fairly tall, and although it felt great to be on a bike that looked so good, we were kind of hoping for a little of that Tuono or RSV sting to be in evidence. Instead, throttle response was very controlled.

Then we realised we were in 'Touring' mode. Obviously we wanted to experience 'Sport'.

Unfortunately, trying to remember all the instructions on which knob related to which menu was beyond us as we dealt with the city traffic. We left the map in Touring and headed for the Pacific Highway.

Once we'd settled in and had a few minutes to think about things, we began working our way through the menus and instructions. With a little use it all became second nature. Changing maps only takes a few seconds.

On the freeway the Caponord is every bit as good as it looks.

The cruise control is a gift, the adjustable windscreen offers good protection for riders of average height, and the seat, 'pegs and 'bars combine to give a superb ride.

Speaking of the footpegs, the rubber inserts are quite large. They're probably something like 7mm thick. Taller riders will notice a surprising difference in legroom if they undo the two small nuts and remove the pad from each side.

Naturally, we removed the rubber inserts before going off-road. We're yet to find a pair that will offer any traction to a boot once they have any moisture at all on them. But for road riding, or riding in the seated position generally, they're a good insulator from any vibration that may be lurking about.



Careful

As we settled in to the long, boring run up the coast, we couldn't help but notice there's a real feeling of individuality about the Caponord. The Touring mode only overrides a rider's enthusiasm in the first three gears, so cruising along in top, or changing down a gear for overtaking, means the motor's working without interference, and we loved it!

It has a throaty V-twin growl that gets the blood pumping, and there's no lack of smooth, solid drive. Without the maniac slingshot effect of a transverse four, the Aprilia still surges forward with an impressive and stirring thrust that makes a rider feel like a king. And without being indiscreet, we're talking about the way the bike pulls away from speeds of, say, 140kph.

200kph comes around in such an effortless burst of growling velocity that it's easy to not realise just what kind of fine is being racked up.

It's not only the motor that encourages that kind of riding. The handling, geometry and suspension seem to settle in and crave those kinds of speeds. And yet, the bike feels calm and stable and doesn't seem to be trying.

We imagine we could get into a lot of trouble on the Caponord.

If we did, it'd be worth it.

Braking on the front is excellent, and the ABS setting allows some fairly aggressive

Left: Nice styling, great comfort and strong performance make the Aprilia Caponord Rally a very nice bit of gear.

Below: Mmm...a V-twin. It's a strong and manageable powerplant.



OFF-ROAD TEST

stopping. The rear is a touch short of strength compared to the front. We didn't think this was such a bad thing. With the traction control off it'd be all too easy to get into crazy rear-end lock-ups. The rear brake works well, but doesn't lock up suddenly. It takes a definite move from the rider to get it happening.

Space

The Rally also has a pair of very neat and functional hard panniers. They fit close to the bike, and have those fabulous double-action lids. Each lid can open as a single unit that splits the box or, with the flip of two nylon fasteners, opens only half the top, allowing tight access through the top of the pannier. Fitting and removing the panniers is as easy as it should be on every bike. We found ourselves very quickly in the habit of flipping the key, grabbing the panniers and dropping them in the shed each night.

Too easy.

Set and forget

The single feature of the Caponord that'll excite the most discussion is its suspension. It allows some very tight, fast cornering on and off the tarmac. You can read the bits and pieces elsewhere on these pages, but where preload can be set manually at the touch of a button, the Aprilia has an 'Auto' setting. With this feature engaged the bike constantly reads what's going on and makes adjustments to suspension in real time.

1: The whole bike seems uncluttered and spare. The payoff is some of the switches have two functions. The red starter button starts the motor. Once the motor's running, that same button then becomes the selector for the rider modes.

2: It's just so damn elegant!

3 and 4: The panniers can be used in two different configurations. They snug in tight to the bike.



APRILIA DYNAMIC DAMPING

Aprilia Dynamic Damping (AAD) is a dynamic, semi-active suspension system developed by Aprilia and protected by four patents. The AAD system measures the energy transmitted by bumps on the road surface to the bike and adjusts the hydraulic fork calibration and shock in real time.

In addition to comfort, rideability is also enhanced and safety is increased thanks to further software strategies tied directly to the rider's actions. The system recognises the riding phases (acceleration, throttle release, braking, constant throttle) and adjusts the basic fork and shock settings thanks to a patent which allows specific hydraulic calibration curves to be defined within the adjustment range.

The high precision of the system is entrusted to a selection of sensors that allow the fork and shock extension speed to be measured with maximum accuracy.

In the Aprilia AAD dynamic semi-active suspension system all the rider has to do is ride without any concerns of selecting one setting or another.

At the rear a built-in piggyback shock is electrically adjustable in spring preload to four predefined positions, indicated by specific icons on the digital instrument panel: rider only, rider with passenger, only rider with panniers and rider and passenger with panniers. Then there's the automatic preload control mode for the spring. Once this option is selected the system is able to detect the bike's load by itself – weight of the fuel, rider, passenger, luggage, and so forth – and automatically adjust preload to the optimum value for correct balancing of the bike.



That's it. In real time

We're not big fans of messing about with suspension unless things get extreme, and for us, this feature was brilliant. We wouldn't run it any other way. We were actually left scratching our heads wondering why the Auto setting is a choice. The bike should just be in that mode all the time. Then we realised we hadn't really expected it to work so well. We tried the various settings first, and they were fine. But leaving the choice on Auto means hopping back and forth from road to dirt, with or without panniers, grabbing a pillion or whatever, doesn't require any changes to suspension settings for best performance. The bike reads the situations and adjusts accordingly. In an especially nice touch, a patient observer can watch the preload collar moving on the very visible shock.

The suspension suits the bike's intended use. We didn't have any trouble bottoming out the rear or making the front complain, but that was only because we were looking for the limits. Riding the bike sensibly around the dirt roads and potholed backroads was very pleasant. On the road the thing carves some very impressive tight lines and begs a rider to try harder if he dares.

Feeling good

After several days and all sorts of terrain, the thing that sticks in our mind most about the Caponord is that it gives such incredibly good feedback to the rider. It doesn't do anything unexpected, and it lets the rider know what's going on all the time. It doesn't suddenly jump sideways on corrugations or kick the rear end away under heavy braking or run wide on corners. It makes even the most ordinary rider feel he's well in control of this 125hp, 250kg tourer.

The next thing that sticks in our mind, and makes us grin like lunatics, is just how wonderfully this bike performs. Turn all the electronics off, select 'Sport', and cut loose.

If you can handle this wild Italian, it delivers in every department. Keep the engine spinning above about 4000rpm, brake late, carry as much corner speed as you dare and crack that throttle open as soon as you can. This bike will show its heritage with smooth, fast lines that'll have other riders wondering what the hell just happened. We especially loved when it exited corners and the 'bars began to just ever-so-slightly fall away as the front wheel must've been just a millimetre or two off the road.

Did we have MotoGP dreams or what!

'Glorious' is the way we feel about the Caponord.



Above: The front brake is predictably strong. Just as well, too. This bike can ramp up some serious pace in a very short distance. The ABS still allows some hard braking.

Below: The bike's well up-to-date with electronics, but somehow maintains an understated elegance. Even the single instrument panel looks good.

APRILIA CAPONORD RALLY

Web: www.aprilia.com.au.

RRP: \$23,000 ride away

Engine type: Aprilia, liquid-cooled, 12-valve, DOHC, four-valves-per-cylinder, 90-degree V-twin

Capacity: 1197cc

Bore/stroke: 106mm x 67.8mm

Compression ratio: 12.0:1

Rated output: 125hp (92kW) at 8000rpm

Maximum torque: 115Nm at 6800rpm

System: Integrated engine-management system. Two injectors per cylinder and ride-by-wire throttle control with three-way mapping: (S) Sport, (T) Touring and (R) Rain

Rider assist: Aprilia Traction Control (ATC). Three levels plus deactivation

Ignition: Marelli 7SM ECU. Twin spark plugs per cylinder. Integrated with engine management system

Starter: Electric

Exhaust: Stainless steel 2-in-1, with integrated catalytic converter and twin oxygen sensor

Lubrication: Wet sump

Gearbox: Six-speed

Final drive: Chain. Ratio 17/42

Front suspension: Sachs 43mm upside-down forks. Hydraulic rebound and compression damping electronically managed with ADD (Aprilia Dynamic Damping)

Rear suspension: Sachs dynamic monoshock with spring preload and hydraulic rebound and compression damping electronically managed with ADD (Aprilia Dynamic Damping)

Brakes front: Dual 320mm stainless steel floating discs. Four-spot Brembo monoblock radial calipers, stainless steel braided lines

Brakes rear: Single stainless steel 240mm disc. Single-piston, Brembo caliper. Metal braided hose

ABS: Continental two-channel ABS system

Wheel rims: Lightweight aluminium alloy with three split spokes

Tyres: Radial tubeless tyres. Front 120/70-R19. Rear 170/60-R17

Fuel tank capacity: 24 litres (including five-litre reserve)

Transmission: Six-speed

Frame: Tubular steel trellis

Swingarm: Aluminium alloy

Maximum length: 2280mm

Maximum height: 1475mm

Seat height: 840mm

Wheelbase: 1575mm

Dry weight: 247kg

BIKE SPECS



Triumph 800XR_x Tiger

If the XCx is a serious adventure mutha, the XR_x is the sexy sister. It's tight, light and fast, and you really want to ride it.



There's a huge swathe of riders who build their adventures to include the excitement of hugging tight curves on mountain roads, hammering along little-used country byways and exploring secondary dirt roads. These guys don't go looking for technically challenging trails, savage hillclimbs and tank-deep river crossings, but they need to know their bikes can cope if those things crop up.

For those riders, Triumph has the XR_x. It has a heap of familiar features from the Tiger 800 XCx *Adventure Rider Magazine* has enjoyed so much, but it's just a little slinkier, a shade more compact, and noticeably more flickable on the road.

It's also extremely comfortable, has killer good looks and is a ton of fun.

The same, but different

For anyone who's ridden the Tiger 800 XCx the XR_x will feel familiar straight away. The same three-cylinder, 800cc motor sits in the same trellis frame, and the tank, seat and instrumentation are all the same spec. The rider modes – Road, Off-road and Rider – are there, and the controls and peripherals are all distinctively Tiger.

But sitting on the bike straight away causes the eyebrows to rise. So many things are so familiar, the things that feel different are all the more surprising, and the first thing is the lower seat height.

We chuckled to ourselves at being so knowledgeable and experienced and everything, and jumped off to flick the seat to its higher position. Except, when we checked, it was already on the 'high' setting. The seat is a whopping 35mm lower than its XC stablemate.

The same feeling embraced us when the front end felt so



light. As we rode a little more we realised it wasn't so much 'light' as 'fast'. The smaller front wheel is obvious – a 19-inch instead of the 21-inch on the XCx – but what's not so easy to see is the wheelbase being a substantial 15mm shorter. The result is a very nimble and fast-handling 800.

Then, the more we rode, the more we found ourselves carrying a surprising amount of mid-corner speed and slamming open the ride-by-wire throttle as the bike railed around to line up the exit. The lean

angle was enough to cause a real rush of blood to the groinular area, too.

Hmm...

It's still a Tiger, but it has a few different stripes to the ones we're used to.

Leisure seekers

What would prompt a rider to choose a bike like this one over the more off-road-oriented XCx?

It didn't take us long to work that out.

This Tiger is for that huge group of riders who live for country pubs, scenic destinations and being able to head for out-of-the-way places without worrying about whether or not the bike will cope with whatever happens on the way. Putting the feet down at the lights or for a yarn at an intersection is easy, and the aerodynamics make for a minimum of buffeting. Another way of looking at it might be to say the XRx will suit riders

who ride for leisure, not challenge.

In that context the XRx is a peach. It's comfortable, very, very rewarding to ride and is still more than ready for the unexpected challenges and obstacles that make for an adventure. The hard panniers – which we normally don't like because they catch on trees and things – allow for easy and secure luggage transport, and everything about the bike is polished and smooth.

We're grinning quietly to ourselves as we write this, because the XRx has a major-league ace up its sleeve that we haven't mentioned yet.

It's a performer.

Good sport

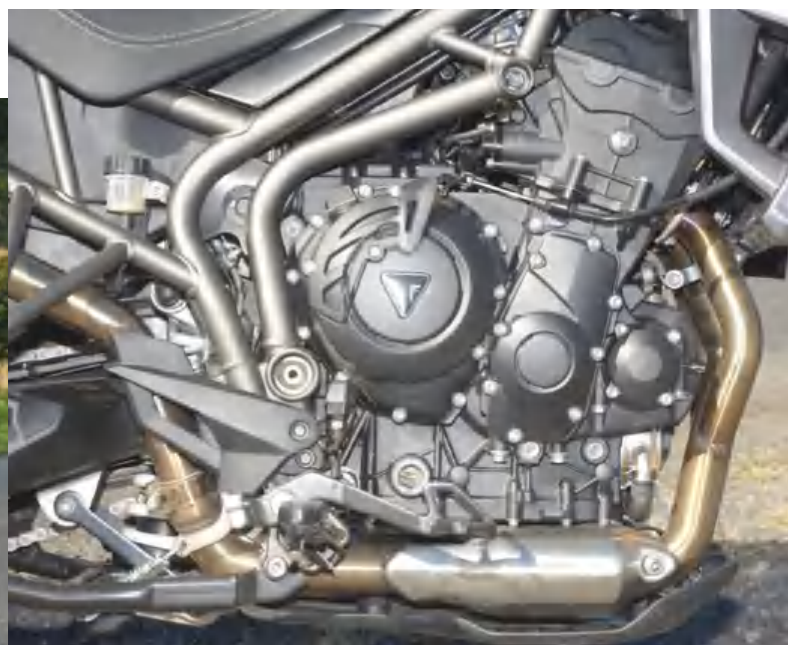
We don't normally have much call to talk about on-road performance with adventure bikes. They're all fairly good these days. But we can't stop grinning when we think about how the XRx carves a tight line and powers hard through bitumen turns. It's stable and comfortable in a straight line up to some fairly ridiculous speeds, and that might make a rider think it'd be reluctant in turns, but the opposite is true. The bike feels a little like it falls into corners.

We were a little put off by the feeling at first, but once we became used to it we realised the super-smooth motor and equally smooth gearbox could be combined with the sensational braking to actually drive the bike hard through the turn – as opposed to the point-and-shoot method some of the taller bikes prefer. The 'falling' feeling means the bike's starting the turn with no effort from the rider. All that needs to be done is select the line, keep the throttle and brake application smooth, and

Left: The XRx loves a scenic mountain road.

Above: It's clearly a Tiger, but geometry and a smaller front wheel make it a sharper-handling package than the XCx.

Below right: There's nothing much left for us to say about this engine. We've been in love with it since we first rode the Tiger 800XC some years ago, and it's still one of our favourites.



OFF-ROAD TEST

hoo-aah! Mountain roads are a wet dream.

Seriously, anyone who enjoys a taste of road-bike-type performance is going to go crazy-ape bonkers for the XRx.

And the braking! The feel and power at both ends is fantastic, and that, combined with the ride-by-wire throttle, allows for very precise input from the rider.

The other thing the XRx offers for the throttle jockies is the same linear feel to the power and torque delivery that make the XCx so manageable in tough going. As we were scratching our way through the curves it meant the motor wasn't in the least intimidating. It felt as though the whole 95 horsepower is there to use. Unlike some sports bikes that frighten the poo out of a rider and leave him scared to use what the motor offers, this bike encourages a rider to have a red-hot go, and then makes that action seem easy.

Nice

Once we settled down and began to consider our professional obligations the XRx again showed its quality. It's a real pleasure to ride when sticking to the speed limit, and on the freeway the cruise control is a gift. On secondary and dirt roads – not trails – it made life easy.

We were surprised at how comfortable the standing position is. Riders up to around 180cm are going to sit and stand on the XRx in comfort, and that's a good thing, because while the front end is lively and precise on the road, the payback is that it's not as steady off road as its sister the XC. A set of more aggressive tyres would make an enormous difference off-road, but then, of course, some of the cornering precision on the bitumen would be compromised. That's something each rider will have to decide for themselves.

They're tubeless tyres, by the way. There's a lot to like about tubeless, especially how easy it is to chuck a set of plugs in the toolkit instead of levers, tubes and a beadbreaker.

Set and forget

The suspension worked well for us, but there's no adjustment except preload on the rear. The action was good, especially on ripples and small corrugations, so we were happy. We can't see the XRx being often in situations where it's going to need suspension tweaking. It'll cope with just about everything expected of it as it is.

Those who are feisty and outside the 'average' weight range will have to have



Left: A blast along dirt roads is good fun. Above: Braking is superb, front and rear. Attention to aerodynamics makes for a comfortable rider. Note the shaping of the fork protectors, for instance. Touches like the guard being painted to match the tank give the bike a beautiful, polished look. Below: The same, easy-to-read instruments and easy-to-use rider modes we liked on other Tigers.

a suspension tuner have a look if they find it a problem, but we were satisfied with the stock set up, even with the 62-litre Adventure panniers fitted. We put tools in one side and a camera bag in the other to approximate the five-kilo payload each pannier is designed for and expected the bike to feel lumpy as a result. The pendulum effect is there, undeniably, but it didn't create any problems we could find.

It's no different to when we carry those same loads in any type of pannier, except when we stopped for a coffee in town we just left everything on the bike, locked up and secure.

That was an interesting experience for us. We were once again left wondering if we hadn't been missing something. Maybe there's a place for hard panniers after all?

The pannier-mount system on the Triumph





is interesting, too. It works on a concealed cable that connects the two cases, and as the bike leans, the panniers have a little lateral movement that lets them lean too. It's tricky to explain, and to be brutally honest, we couldn't feel a big advantage from the set-up.

Of course, we don't use hard panniers normally, so we're not good ones to be offering an opinion on the rig.

A smart choice

There's a lot about Triumph's XR_x that's caused us to have a good long think about things. Mostly it's started us thinking about riding for leisure and pleasure instead of survival. There's a world of enjoyment to be had from just being on a great bike and taking in some fabulous countryside. The manufacturers know it, and that's why we have bikes like Kawasaki's Versys, BMW's F700GS, Suzuki's V-stroms and heaps of others. The XR_x is a beautiful example of the genre. Its performance on the road is sharp enough to keep any adventure rider grinning, and on the dirt it's still very capable. There's no doubt the 19-inch front wheel has more of a tendency to follow ruts than a 21-inch wheel, and less ground clearance might seem a problem to the hard-core off-landers, but that's the point. This isn't a hard-core off-roader. And if you yourself aren't a hard-core off-roader, the XR_x might give more smiles per kilometre than you'd thought possible.

We haven't stopped grinning since we first rode this bike, but we'll get serious again soon.

As soon as we have to give this Tiger back.

ADV



Above left: The mounting system for the Adventure panniers allows a little controlled movement. Fitting and removing the hard panniers takes just a few seconds.

Above: The bike is very comfortable for a standing rider, but, as usual, we had to remove the rubber inserts from the footpegs to stop our feet sliding off in the wet. They pull straight out, no tools needed.

Above right: We fell for the ol' 'Open the pannier and have everything fall out' trick. It does make for easy access though, and Triumph has a set of liner bags available.

Below: Damn that blue is nice!

TRIUMPH 800XR_x TIGER

Web: www.triumphmotorcycles.com.au

Rec retail: \$16,590 plus ORC

Adventure panniers: \$1046

Pannier mounting kit: \$455.20

Engine type: Liquid-cooled, 12-valve, DOHC, in-line three-cylinder

Displacement: 800cc

Bore/stroke: 74.05mm x 61.94mm

Rated output: 95PS (70Kw) at 9250rpm

Maximum torque: 79Nm at 7850rpm

System: Multipoint sequential electronic fuel injection

Exhaust: Stainless steel 3-into-1, high-level stainless steel silencer

Gearbox: Six-speed

Final drive: O-ring chain

Clutch: Wet, multi-plate

Oil capacity: 3.7 litres

Starter: Electric

Fuel tank capacity: 19 litres

Transmission: Six-speed

Frame: Tubular steel trellis

Swingarm: Twin-sided, cast aluminium alloy

Front suspension: Showa 43mm upside-down forks, 180mm travel

Rear suspension: Showa monoshock with hydraulically adjustable preload, 170mm travel

Front wheel: 10-spoke 19 x 2.5 inch, cast aluminium alloy

Rear wheel: 10-spoke 17 x 4.25 inch, cast aluminium alloy

Front tyre: 100/90-19

Rear tyre: 150/70 R17

Length: 2215mm

Width (handlebars): 829mm

Height (without mirrors): 1350mm

Seat height: 810mm/830mm (adjustable)

Wheelbase: 1530mm

Brakes front: Twin 308mm floating discs. Nissin twin-piston sliding calipers, switchable ABS

Brakes rear: Single 255mm disc. Nissin single-piston sliding caliper, Switchable ABS

Wet weight: 216kg

Dry weight: 191kg

BIKE SPECS

Motorbikin'

The Madigan Line

In 2010, the Motorbikin' Team pulled off the first recorded crossing of the Madigan Line from Mount Dare to the Hay River. In 2015, the team took a shot at the whole shebang, almost 800km from Mount Dare to Birdsville. Phil Hodgens has the story.

Words and images: Phil Hodgens



Six Safari-tanked adventure bikes rested easy on their sidestands in the darkness as the smell of fresh-baked bread rose from the bakery and drifted across the sleeping outback town of Birdsville. Inside, six nervous riders clutched steaming mugs of coffee as Dusty, the Birdsville baker, loaded loaves into the racks.

"You've been here a while Dusty, any desert advice for us?" asked one nervous rider.

"Stay the f#\$% out of it. It's a dangerous place," he replied deadpan, holding a tray of sesame seed buns to his chest.

Our fate was sealed. We mounted up and rode off into the grey dawn.

Brake down

Our six-man team was made up of Vince, Brian and Steve on DR650s, Mario and me on DRZ400s and our solicitor, Bob, on a lone WR450F.

When you ride with the Motorbikin' Team, it pays to take your solicitor.

The show ground to a halt 10km out of town when the bolts securing Bob's front brake made a desperate bid for freedom, launching the caliper into his spokes.

Left: As the line arced south for Birdsville the sand turned from blood red to a paler shade and became soft and fine.

Top: A gruelling course.

Above right: Accom doesn't get any better than this. Below: The Safari tanks were brilliant.



His ride could easily have ended there, but the brakeline survived unscathed, and with a couple of M8 bolts from the tool bag, we were back on track.

Fork's sake!

We had a rendezvous planned with our mate Easo on the far side of The Simpson, and with 1100 dunes between us we were going to have to rattle our dags to make it in before dark. We fell into formation with Vince and Mario up front, Bob and Brian in the middle and Steve and I bringing up the rear. Each settled into a steady, distance-eating rhythm, powering up the steep eastern slopes of the dunes, braking at the top, then powering on down the western slope as a plume of roost rose from the rear wheel.

We crossed the salty crust of Lake Poeppel mid-morning and attacked the



dunes of death that stretch west to Knolls Junction. Suspension increased proportionally as fuel loads decreased and we were able to click higher gears as we pushed west on the French Line, tossing glorious red roosts behind us as we counted down the dunes, crest by crest.

By Colson Junction we'd been on the go for almost eight hours straight, and while the bikes were still on song, the riders were showing signs of fatigue. Bike imprints in the red sand with footprints all around told the tale of crashes up front and we breathed a sigh of relief when the rutted clay at Purnie Bore let us click into top gear.

My DRZ went onto reserve not long after, then coughed and died as the 30-litre Safari tank ran dry and I waved Steve on as I topped her up from a 10 litre bladder.

We neared Dalhousie at that awkward time of day when it's not quite light enough to see but not quite dark enough for the lights to work.

"Hmm, that looks like a witch's hat." I mumbled curiously to myself a second before the track disappeared beneath the 400's wheels.

Time slowed as the bike-swallowing chasm passed beneath me and I pondered idly what the hospital food in Alice Springs would be like at this time of year. The forks compressed as the front wheel impacted the other side of the washaway and the rear wheel followed with barely a quiver.

"Good forks on these 400s," I marvelled. "I wonder what's for tea."



Social climber

With no spare clothes, we nudged up and leapt into Dalhousie Hot Springs.

Small piranha-like guppies patrol these waters and the yelps of pain rent the air as they zeroed in on our night tools, and then things got serious when a gaggle of grey-nomad ladies cornered us in the steamy waters.

"Ah, ladies..." Vince cleared his throat. "I don't want to alarm you, but we need to get out and we're not wearing anything."

"Well I can't swim so I'm not letting go of this ladder," their leader replied. "You can climb up past me. I won't mind if anything brushes against me," she beamed.

It was checkmate to the grey nomads.

Birthday suit

It was Vince's 62nd birthday and our mate Easo had made him a birthday cake for the occasion. Anyone who's seen Easo in our Motorbikin' DVDs will know he runs on a different wavelength to most folk, so nobody was terribly surprised when he dressed in a full-leather gimp suit to deliver the cake.

Vince is in pretty good shape for his model number and he's shining proof that riding DRs is good for your health. I hope I'm still riding big red dunes at 62.

Bored

We rose with the sun and saddled up for Mount Dare where things would start to get serious. We had almost 800km in front of us for the return run and no real idea of conditions.

The Madigan Line only sees one to two parties of vehicles per year and the track can vary from faint to completely

non-existent. We took on around 65 litres of fuel each between our Safari tanks and a collection of fuel bladders, and 20 litres of water in MSR bladders.

We were expecting an easy transport north up Binns Track, but instead we hit bulldust and the heavy bikes handled like wheelbarrows full of walruses. By the time we racked up the 160km to Mac Clarke morale was low, but we'd burnt almost 10 kilos of fuel. When the going gets tough on an overloaded bike, it's important to remember the further you go, the lighter it gets.

Dave from Mount Dare had given us a mud map to get us from Mac Clarke east through the maze of station tracks to Madigan's first campsite, but nothing seemed to match up and we rode around in circles, all the while burning precious fuel. In the end we abandoned the map and took a bearing for East Bore. It paid off as we pulled up at the abandoned windmill in failing light.

Swag men

Madigan's first camp lay a few kilometres to the north, marked by a steel post and a small plaque. Cecil Madigan pioneered the route on

foot with a team of camels in 1939 and his camps were spaced 20km to 30km apart, which was pretty good going on foot.

His next three camps lay in Aboriginal land and were off limits, so we pushed east for the Colson Track through low, rocky breakaways. Marshall Bluff rose from the glowing red gibber plains right on sunset, and with plenty of firewood on offer, it was too good a campsite to pass up.

We weren't long out of the swags and I lay back listening to my snoring mates. Bob started up first with a mellow tune as the sounds of *Edelweiss* resonated from his nasal passages. Meanwhile Big Brian had launched into full-on Jimmy Barnes as his thunderous snorts rented the desert air and threatened to start a rockslide up on Marshall Bluff.

"Does your missus ever complain about your snoring?" I asked timidly the next morning.

"Sometimes," he shrugged. "I just tell her as far as I know, they're still makin' husbands."

Dave's mud map delivered gold as we followed it northeast toward the Colson Track on an old shot line.

Left: When you ride with the Motorbikin' team, it pays to take your solicitor. He can help you interpret the finer legal points of signs seen on the way.



DR650 VERSUS DR2400

The DR650 ran a D606 rear and a Geo Max front with ultra-heavy-duty tubes, and despite running cross country, we didn't get a single flat. The Jebtech fuel pods coupled with a Safari tank up front gave it over 50 litres of fuel, all plumbed into the carb with vacuum pumps.

Brian crash tested the Jebtech fairing extensively and gave it two thumbs up as a tough bit of gear. Head to www.jebtech.com.au for more info.

The DRZ400 ran the same rubber with no problems and a 30-litre Safari tank up front coupled with fuel bladders in custom canvas slings we borrowed off our mate Joe Morgan. A Stainey pipe gave the 400 a bit more punch.

Both bikes ran Pivot Pegz and MSC steering dampers with B&B bashplates to complete the picture, making them pretty much all-Australian made.

The suspension on the 400 made it our choice in the tougher going of the Madigan and we had it pegged as the best bike until we hit the road into Birdsville and the 650s left it in a cloud of dust!

Australia is a big country and the mile-eating ability of the 650 makes it the king of versatility.

That said, there's a lot to be said for the light weight and nimble handling of the 400, and if the mere thought of lifting a loaded DR650 makes a blood-fart bubble in your undies, then the 400 is the bike for you.

Vince Strang Motorcycles can set both bikes up as mild or wild as you like.





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Relief

Rusting remains littered the gibber plains and were a reminder of the drilling rigs that had ventured into this wasteland in search of oil and gas. The track was overgrown but had weathered the years well and we covered the 40km or so to the Colson in an hour.

By comparison, it had taken us over a day on our previous attempt, thrashing cross-country through the sand moguls.

Camp Five lay just a few kilometres up the Colson and we ticked it off and roosted east over a massive dune, following the pink line on the GPS to Camp Six. The sand of the northern Simpson is a different colour and texture to the dunes of the French Line in the south. It's a deep, blood red that burns like a fire as the sun inches closer to the horizon.

We made steady progress eastward, pausing at each of Madigan's camps to rest and transfer fuel from bladders into the main tanks.

We stopped to check the visitors' book at Camp 10, and in the five years since we'd last passed this way, only one other motorcycle had been through; a lone 640 heading west from the Hay River.

Only two or three parties of cars had been through each year over the last decade and the sheer scale of what we were undertaking began to sink in to the team. No other motorcycles had ever attempted an entire Madigan Crossing from Mount Dare to Birdsville. We were about to set a record.

Madigan had left Camp 10 in low spirits with

his men exhausted and their camels in bad shape. They travelled less than three kilometres and crested a dune to find a swale rich with grazing for the camels and so decided to call it a day. We knew exactly how they felt as we roosted east, and when Vince pointed to a cleared area with plenty of firewood, the team breathed a sigh of relief as we kicked out our sidestands and unpacked our swags.

Sign off

With an early start we made the Hay River Track by mid-morning and pulled up at Camp 16 where Madigan had blazed a tree nearly 75 years ago. The tree still stands but the blaze has long since grown over. Vandals had defaced a plaque commemorating the tree and we shook our heads at their senseless actions. It just goes to show that even the most remote places in Australia are not free from cockheads.

By that stage we'd burnt over half our fuel and water load and the bikes were around 40kg lighter and starting to handle again. We had our sights set on

a beer at Birdsville, but the Madigan Line had other ideas.

Slow going

The second leg of the Madigan had only recently been opened and was an unknown to us...as it turned out, it was the toughest leg of the line.

As the line arced south for Birdsville the sand turned from blood red to a paler shade and became soft and fine. The track was difficult to spot so we abandoned it and spread out, following the pink line on the GPS.

By midday we were starting to overheat with the high temperatures and slow going, and when Bob's WR developed a fuel leak it was a relief to pull over in the shade of some gidgee to fix it. We were on the move again in an hour but it was obvious we weren't going to make Birdsville, and when Vince suggested we make an early camp on a clay pan near Camp 18, we weren't about to argue.

The final leg

We hit more clay pans the next morning and held the bikes flat as we skimmed across the salt flats. The salt must've been verging on radioactive as it began to attack all metal surfaces within hours.

Camp 20 was marked on the banks of the dry Muncoonie Lake and we turned and headed south, following a massive dry channel that drained floodwater to Lake Eyre in the wet.

The ruins of old Annandale Station marked the site for Camp 21 and a tragedy of the outback.

Locals don't talk much about it, but the husband was forced to head out in search of work during a drought, leaving his wife and two children behind. When they ran out of water, she made the tough decision to poison them all to save a slow and painful death by thirst. The two children died, but she survived and was found wandering in the dunes nearby. Crosses made of weathered timber and wire mark the graves beside the ruins as the dunes gradually reclaim what was once theirs.

Camps 23 and 24 are on private property and out of bounds, so we headed south between the dunes to the QAA Line and back over Big Red to Birdsville where the final plaque for Camp 25 is nailed to the bar at the pub.

I reckon you know what happened next. Want to check out the full story? Head to www.motorbikin.com.au and grab a copy of the DVD!

ADV



Top: The sand of the northern Simpson is a different colour and texture to the dunes of the French Line in the south. It's a deep, blood red that burns like a fire as the sun inches closer to the horizon.

Left: Maps weren't always as helpful as they might've been.

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60 hours, two bikes and one buffoon

Words and images: Nick Fletcher

The chance to ride Tasmania's toughest track seemed too good to miss. Nick Fletcher gave it a shot.



Most of us simply can't take five weeks off work to ride around Australia.

For many, a three-day weekend is a luxury. Rupert – aka The Buffoon, see issue #09 – and I typically keep our rides down to a few days, principally because beyond four days he becomes unbearable. So the suggestion of a dirty weekend to ride the 'hardest track in Tasmania' appeared unusually attractive.

A quick search of ferry prices demonstrated the power of a monopoly, with a fare structure that wanted \$1000 and the life of a cherished child in return for shipping a bike and a rider from Melbourne to Tasmania. Consequently the plan was quietly shelved until many months later when I got the call from Rupert.

"Hey," he blurted, "I've found a deal. Our bikes and us on the ferry, plus two nights' accommodation for \$800. It's a bargain!"

"Great stuff, Rupert!" I beamed. "Get it booked and we can sort the details out later."

Sister act

It wasn't until sometime later that I asked the obvious question:

"Where's the accommodation?"

Rupert shot back, "On the ferry."

"What do you mean on the ferry?" I asked, suspicious.

"They're going to give us a cabin for two nights," was the Buffoon's deadpan response.

"So basically you've got us a return overnight ferry ticket with our own cabin?" was my irritated response.

"No," he admitted. "We're sharing the cabin with two other people. Fingers crossed for Danni and Kylie!"

'Danni and Kylie' turned out to be John and Steve. One was a founding member of the Velocette Motorcycle Owners Club and the other the Bendigo senior snoring champion for 19 years running.

Public warning

The *Spirit Of Tasmania* was always going to be the most testing part of the trip.

Rupert in an enclosed environment is really an exercise in tolerance.



Left: A rising tide, a dead bike and soft sand. The situation obviously required the author to grab his camera rather than help.

Above: Rupert Shaw – entirely fuelled by caffeine and lard.

Top right: The Pieman ferry bloke admired Rupert's fancy dress.

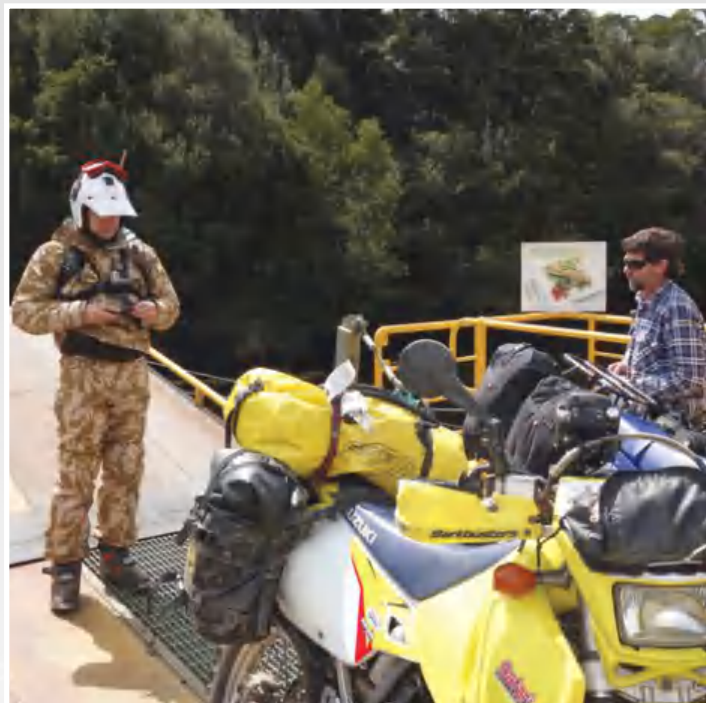
Right: This was the only rideable bridge left on Climies Track.

Furthermore, I'd had a catastrophic planning failure and ended up trying to conduct a high-powered work teleconference while Rupert was feeding me VBs and feigning intercourse with a pot plant. Fortunately I managed to keep Rupert away from impressing the 14 year olds in the disco by supplying him with more beer. I should add that I was funding this entire exercise, as Rupert had conveniently forgotten to bring any money (to be fair he did pay me back, carefully annotating the transaction in my bank account as 'butt-plug refund').

After 12 pots of VB each, a steak, a bottle of wine and a formal warning from the purser we retired to bed where Rupert attempted to drown out the snoring with his flatulence.

God's own track

It was an early start in Devonport, and tradition required us to fritter this away with a leisurely breakfast at ►





Main: 'It started with mind-blowing views of rugged, wind-blown surf.

Left: This ended badly.

Bottom left: A riverbed masqueraded as a track.

Bottom right: A normal Rupert/Nick campsite featuring a broken TTR, a half-finished bottle of whiskey and Rupert's underwear in the trees.

the nearest café. A number of the Velocette owners joined us, their bikes leaving an even larger oil slick than Rupert's Japanese Lady's Bike, an ageing TTR250.

We then had a brief road ride heading south-west through beautiful rolling hills gradually gaining altitude.

The deeper inland we went the colder it got, and by 10.00am we had to stop in Waratah just to warm up. Fortunately, the only café in town turned out to be the only Op Shop as well, and I was able to secure a pair of \$2.00 woollen mittens to put over my winter bike gloves.

Pushing further west we transitioned on to well-made, sandy roads and passed the hideous Kara mine – essentially a mining-industry sponsored advertisement for The Greens political party.

Gradually the forest closed in and we reached the Pieman River, the crossing of which required the use of the second-most expensive ferry in Australia.

No turning back

We were aiming for 'the hardest track in Tasmania'. Through the power of the

interweb I'd established that the little known Climies Track runs between Granville Harbour and Trial Harbour, that it had a statistically significant fatality rate and that it would likely give us ample opportunity to test the effectiveness of our ambulance cover.

To get to it we pushed further west on increasingly smaller and smaller roads.

In a classic Nick/The Buffoon moment we blindly followed the GPS across a farmer's field, through a small wood and even under a barbed-wire fence. We quickly got ourselves into a position where we couldn't backtrack because we would have some serious explaining to do to an irate farmer.

After some additional floundering, including manoeuvring bikes over and around locked gates, we eventually dropped down an old farm track towards the coast.

Bank error

We arrived on a track that could only have been created if God were a dirtbiker. I couldn't be more serious in saying that. If you only ride one track in Tasmania it has to be this one.

It started with mind-blowing views of rugged, wind-blown surf. We even watched a Taswegian spearfisherman pull out five huge crays over 15 minutes. We then set off on a wonderful twisty, sandy track with no one else in sight.

The track became more broken, steeper



and wilder by the kilometre. Indeed, it was probably one good storm away from being unrideable. There were creeks without bridges, huge washouts and ascents that looked like something out of Erzberg. All the time we looked out on scenery that was as if it'd been Photoshopped.

We soon reached the memorial to the three quad bikers who were washed to their death in 2006. The bridge had long ago fallen into the creek and all that was left was a crossing far above the beach with the river plunging down a steep rockfall to the sea. The crossing looked innocuous, but the river was deeper, faster-flowing and more difficult than it first appeared. It wasn't hard to imagine how, on another day, with a bit more water, you could get yourself into real trouble. As it was, a surprised local on a well-ridden WR250F got to witness me dropping the bike trying to get it up the hill on the other side of the crossing. He seemed somewhere between amused and perplexed at Rupert and I trying to ride his local extreme enduro circuit with full panniers and no talent.

Off track

The highlight of Rupert's ride was a short bridge crossing that had been reduced to a single plank. Rupert, being a man of little imagination, confidently rode the Plank Of Doom. I didn't, and ended up swimming in a stinking creek.

Retribution was soon to visit Rupert when,

minutes later, the Japanese Lady's Bike stopped dead in the middle of a saddle-deep bog crossing. A joint recovery effort was launched, and the blue turdpile was manhandled to the far bank, where five minutes of kicking had the unkillable machine coughing back into life again.

After an hour-and-a-half and 24km we had dispatched the track.

Illicit camping

We had a very late lunch in Zeehan, stocked up on whiskey and steak and headed to the beach in search of somewhere to hide out for the night. Our philosophy is that the only thing better than a free campsite is an illegal one.

We arrived to find the tide out, and that gave us a chance to tear up and down a truly stunning deserted beach. As an Englishman I could only giggle uncontrollably and think that at some point someone was going to ban this sort of nonsense.

Unfortunately, Rupert's Japanese Lady's Bike again stopped dead, this time in the face of a rising tide in very soft, very wet, sand.

This was clearly a bike-threatening situation and one that required urgent action on my behalf. Within seconds I had deployed my camera and had some lovely black-and-white silhouette shots of Rupert and his bike sinking slowly into the sand. Much to my dismay he managed to get his blue shitheap restarted before

he was claimed by the tide.

It wasn't until that night we figured out Rupert's bike mechanic hadn't properly tightened the battery earth lead during one of its many garage visits.

Back to work

We found a secluded campsite in the bush behind the beach, and the evening was spent eating steak, finishing the whiskey and enjoying the sight of Rupert's underwear hanging from the foliage (I couldn't disagree with his assertion that it needed 'airing').

Another early start the following morning saw us tearing back to Devonport, this time by way of Queenstown, Derwent Bridge and the edges of the Walls Of Jerusalem National Park. This took us across more spectacular Tasmanian scenery, and despite this being April there was still snow on the ground and it was still bloody freezing.

We arrived at the port in time to pressure wash the sand off the bikes before joining the ferry for another night of VB, red wine and tomfoolery.

After four hours' sleep we were back in Melbourne with 750km and the hardest track in Tasmania under our belts. I headed straight into the office for a quick wash in time to greet the first of my colleagues arriving for work. "Get up to much at the weekend, Nick?" he asked.


"Just a couple of beers with a friend," I answered, smiling.

ADV

To rev or not to rev

Words: The reverin' Miles Davis

A little thought about throttle use and engine revs can make a big difference to a few important aspects of a bike's performance.

A full-page background image showing a rider on a BMW adventure motorcycle, likely a G31, in a desert environment. The rider is wearing a blue jacket, a black helmet with goggles, and blue gloves. The motorcycle is dark-colored with a large wind deflector. The rider is leaning forward, and the front headlight is on. The background is a dry, hilly landscape with sparse vegetation under a clear sky.

Let's face it: the sweet sound of an engine powering out of a corner can be music to a rider's ears. There are lots of different bikes, engines, and even more kinds of riders. Some engines have more bottom-end grunt while others have more top-end punch. One thing plain to see is how some riders always seem to rev a bike close to redline at every gear change while others swap cogs at lower revs. Depending on the bike and the situation there are pros and cons for each, but it pays to understand when it makes sense to grab the next cog quickly and when it's best to hold a gear and rev the engine a bit harder.

Short change

Obviously there's a big difference between racing and social riding. Generally a racer will need to rev a bike pretty hard to



get the best possible result. But even then some elite racers prefer to short shift. Stefan Merriman, a multiple enduro world champion, is a good example. He was well known to grab gears early and be lightning fast. So when you're out riding, and especially if you're on the bike for longer distances, you can keep up a great pace, ride smoother, expend less energy and be kinder to your bike by grabbing gears a bit earlier.

Understand your bike

Power is the buzzword, but torque is what really counts, and for this reason, most adventure bikes tend to be tuned for torque more than outright peak horsepower.

From my experience a lot of riders don't know how much torque their bike has and how they can use it to their advantage.

A great test of a bike's power delivery is to cruise along in, say, second or third gear, and roll off the throttle. See if the bike will lug along on flat, smooth, firm terrain at zero throttle without any hesitation. Many bikes will. Then roll the throttle on gently and see

how the engine reacts. Does it build revs smoothly without hesitation? If not, find out how low the revs can go and the bike still be able to accelerate smoothly. Then do the same, but roll on the throttle with a bit more gusto. My guess is most riders would be surprised at how well a 650 or bigger will handle this sort of low-rpm zone. Most riders will also notice the transition from rolling on to rolling off the throttle at lower, torquey, revs. The change is very smooth and keeps the bike nice and stable. Out on the trail, this smoothness translates to stability and improved traction on slippery surfaces or heading up steep climbs.

On the flip side, see what the motor's got up top. Rev the bike from idle to redline and see how the power's delivered.

You should also notice that the bike is less balanced when transitioning on and off throttle at higher rpm. Whenever we run customer test rides we suggest riders do exactly this. Test the lower-rev torque feel, especially in corners, to see how smooth the bike feels and how easily it changes direction, as well as giving it a good rev to see



MILES DAVIS

how much grunt it's got. Many riders concentrate on the latter and don't get a feel for the low-down grunt, which really is more important.

Commuting, transport or remote riding

If I'm out just clocking up kilometres I'll generally be in the tallest gear the bike will pull. On an 800 GS or 1200 GS, that means I might take off from a set of lights and click from first to sixth before I hit 70kph or 80kph. Then I'll click down gears only as required to keep the engine in the 'happy revs' (not chugging or losing that smooth feeling). I ride the same off road when I'm just cruising along eating up distance. I find this gives the smoothest result and generally I don't see any benefit to revving the engine any harder.

Sometimes I treat it as a challenge to see how smooth I can ride. Everyone has heard the saying 'smooth is fast', right? This technique is especially handy when riding in remote areas when you want your fuel, tyres and energy to last as long as possible.

Having a bit of a go

When the roads and trails get a bit more interesting my ears prick up a little. If I want to find a faster, flowing pace I'll generally roll the throttle on a bit, but still usually grab gears quite early and almost never get close to redline. An exception is when one corner is closely followed by another and it doesn't make sense to grab that extra



Far left: You might need to, or just want to, hit the rev limiter every now and then. It can be a bit of fun, but it generally comes at the expense of tyre life and fuel range.

Top: Riding in sand is a good time to think about short shifting. Overspinning the rear wheel will cause it to dig in. Keep the bike moving and the revs low to stay on top of the loose surface.

Left: Obviously there's a big difference between racing and social riding.



gear as it will probably need to be downshifted almost immediately.

It would surprise many riders the pace that can be held when riding like this. And it's not just the speed, it's the consistency, smoothness and how easy you can do it that are the real benefits.

Race face

If you're having a proper go and are with riders who are at a similar pace, you might need to, or just want to, hit the rev limiter every now and then. It can be a bit of fun, but it generally comes at the expense of tyre life and fuel range. That's no problem if you don't need either at the time.

Obviously the risks go up too, so you need to make sure you have all of your focus on the job.

Drifter

Almost everyone loves to get the back to slide out of a corner and it's pretty easy on an adventure bike. I see lots of guys power on in a low gear with high revs, get heaps of spin and opposite lock and have to correct it quickly before they end up on their head. On lots of corners you can crack the throttle early one gear higher, at low revs and get the back to drift, then control that drift with good

throttle control and hold a sweet drift for a lot longer. I love this feeling on a torquey twin cylinder adventure bike!

Riding in sand

I covered sand riding in issue #04, and obviously sand has its own challenges. Sometimes you need to rev pretty hard, like taking off from a standstill. But again, it would surprise a lot of people how you can short shift once you are on top of the sand, like a boat up on the plane. You just need to be ready to add power quickly if required, mostly when the bike starts to get unstable.

If you're always revving it hard in sand you don't have a trump card up your sleeve for when you really need it. Try getting to the point when you can grab another gear and you'll probably do it 10 times easier. Then when you hit a tricky bit, you can add a bit of power to maintain stability.

Uphills

Again, we covered hills in issue #03, and hills are one of the best places you can really use the low-down grunt of a torquey motor to get up steeper, loose hills without getting excess wheel spin and losing control. Sometimes first gear, sometimes second,

Above: You can keep up a great pace, ride smoother, expend less energy and be kinder to your bike by grabbing gears a bit earlier.

Insert above: It can be surprisingly easy to short shift once you're on top of the sand.

and you need to be good with your clutch control too.

I love watching riders who are struggling to make it up a hill because they're too heavy on the throttle. As their wheelspin increases it's really common for them to add more throttle, which is pretty funny when you think about it. Riders who have control with the bike at lower revs will generally get the best results with technical uphill.

Yin and yang

One of the best things about riding is, bikes have an engine and a gearbox and you can ride them however you want to. It's good to know a bike's capabilities and how the different ways of riding it can give an edge in certain situations.

Over the past two years we've covered quite a wide range of 'how to' topics. Please email tom@maynemediamedia.com.au if you have anything in particular you'd like to see covered in an upcoming issue.

ADV

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The numbers game



Before we even kicked off this beaut magazine a couple of years ago, the publisher had a website up and running. The huge number of adventure riders who flocked to the site had a big influence on his decision to make the magazine happen, and now here we all are.

But what's been a bit strange is the website's continued growth. And not only that, but since we've been on Faceplant – sorry FaceBOOK – as well, its numbers are going bananas too.

And there's some amazing stuff going on there in internet land. People are writing great ride reviews that never make it into the mag, a lot of problems are shared and solved between the readers and great rides are planned and friends made.

So we decided it was time to acknowledge some of the great things and awesome people who are using www.advridermag.com.au and www.facebook.com/AdventureRiderMagazine.

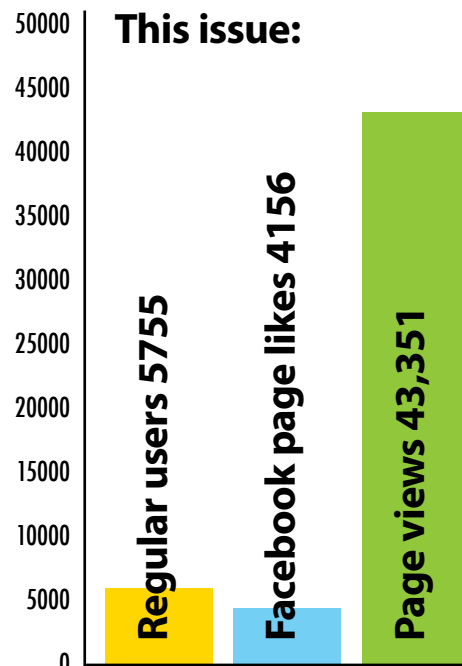
This issue we want to show you liladv's ride report on Northern Thailand. It's a great read with some gorgeous pics, and you can only find it on the website forum.

On the Facebook page the West Aussies are suggesting more stories from their side of the country.

What do you guys think? Should we have more stories from WA?

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As good as it gets

Karen Ramsay shares some hard-won thoughts.

I think I may have peaked. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying my riding can't be improved upon – far from it. It's just I reckon this is as good as I'm going to get without assistance. And despite my riding being at its peak, I've had a number of offs lately.

Sometimes I might get myself in a situation a better rider could easily ride through or recover from. It could be from going too quick, tackling something I really shouldn't or when my riding ability in my head isn't aligned with my actual ability. All of this has got me thinking about how well we're prepared for a fall.

Backfire

My latest off was a bit of a rough one. Fortunately I wasn't badly hurt, but I can say I haven't been able to kneel down and scrub the floor since it happened, and it was entirely due to me trying to be a smart Alec.

Hubby Dave had organised an overnight ride. It was a big group of 19 riders with a great range of bikes, experience and competence. For some reason Dave is reluctant to let me go sweep if we ride in groups. I reckon I'd make an ideal sweep – I'm happy to follow along, I have basic first-aid knowledge

(very basic just in case you're tempted to come off in front of me) and I'm not going to be holding anyone up. I have absolutely no desire to prove my ability to do power slides or be the first person to the gate.

So on this ride I'd been happily travelling along near the back while son Darcy was sweep. Approaching the lunch stop, I thought I'd have some fun and splash Darcy as we went over a crossing. I slowed to let him catch up then moved to the right to get him beside me. Then I twisted the throttle.

This is where the combination of lack of ability and over supply of confidence kicked in.

The next thing I knew, the screen and tank bag were level with my head and I went crashing heavily onto the concrete causeway. Luckily I tend to stay level-headed most of the time, so despite a scarily painful knee, I stretched out to hit the kill switch then kept my thumb up so Darcy wouldn't worry too much when he saw me under the bike.

Having landed heavily with my knee on the concrete, and thinking there was some serious damage, I was thanking my lucky stars I'd recently bought new and improved hip and knee armour to replace the standard foam 'protection'.

The sixth sense

Which brings me to first aid. I always travel with a first-aid kit (except when it's on Dave's bike and we get separated). In the kit I have triangular and rolled bandages, tape, scissors, an eyewash cup, emergency blanket, antihistamines and a range of painkillers. While I don't have private health insurance (and people can debate the pros and cons themselves), I do have ambulance cover. From a few people I've spoken to who've been transported out by ambulance or chopper, you'd be a fool not to have it.

With protective gear, I reckon the more you have the better. No one would guess I'm actually a tiny waif beneath all the gear I wear (well... it's possible). I'd never ride without it. I don't even ride around the block without gloves. What's likely to be the first thing that hits the ground when you come off?

My advice is to get gear that's good quality, comfortable and fits well.

I've also learned to listen to what my body is telling me. These days I'll turn around and come home if I don't have a good feeling about the day or the ride. I've done that on a few occasions. Unfortunately the sixth sense isn't infallible... which is why there's been a few offs.

What I've learned

- ✓ Being a smart Alec can easily backfire
- ✓ Apparently sweeps need to be quick at tyre changes
- ✓ Always trust your instinct
- ✓ Good protective gear is worth its weight in gold
- ✓ Always check your undies before a ride

Karen has proven she has no fear of water crossings.



Main: A causeway treated with respect is no problem. But they tend to be slippery buggers, and any over-enthusiasm can be harshly punished.



Karen Ramsay

Wardrobe malfunction

Finally, and most irrationally, are the superstitions.

I have a necklace I wear without fail every time I ride (including the rides where I've had an off. In psychology I think it's justified by saying it would've been worse if I hadn't been wearing it). Other people put their boots on in a particular order or have a lucky t-shirt. Painfully undressing after my worst off, I discovered I'd been wearing my undies inside-out and back-to-front. It's lucky I had any on, being so nervous at having had multiple offs the day before and getting dressed in the dark. But I maintain to this day that had a bearing on my riding.

Ultimately, I reckon the motto 'be prepared' – for road and weather conditions, for kangaroos around the corner, for flat tyres and anything else that could potentially occur – will stand every rider in good stead.

ADV



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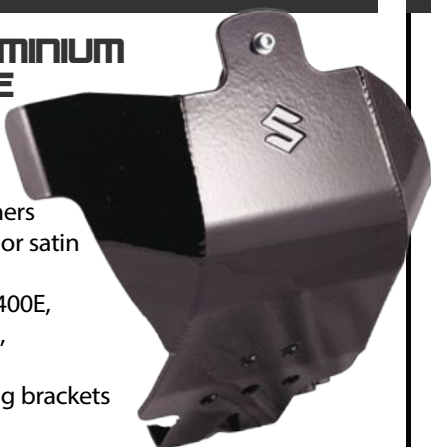
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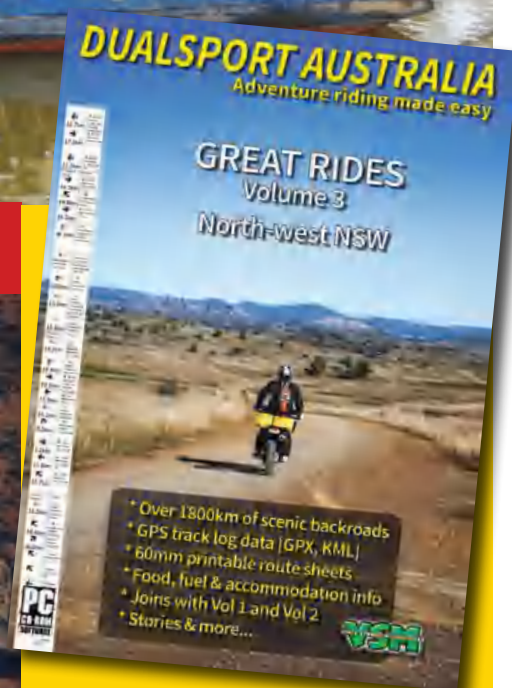
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